

**SPECIAL
REPORT**

THE RISE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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John**
—
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Trump Unbound
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RS 1256

"All the
News
That Fits"

FEATURES

President Trump, Seriously

He's no ordinary con man. He's way above average – and the American political system is his easiest mark ever.

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He got rejected by his record label, is feuding with his mother and has a couple of regrets about the 1980s. So why is he so happy?

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Computers diagnose disease, drive cars and may soon think for themselves. But are we on the verge of creating a new life-form – or something much darker?

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Elton John
circa 1974.
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Metallica
in 1985

INTERVIEW

METALLICA LOOK BACK

For the 30th anniversary of *Master of Puppets*, Metallica's Lars Ulrich and Kirk Hammett, along with co-producer Flemming Rasmussen, talk about the making of the breakthrough LP – and the devastating loss of original bassist Cliff Burton, who died in 1986.



NEW MUSIC

SANTIGOLD'S NEW FIGHT

The singer talks about her politically minded third record, 99¢. "The fact that we're still talking about abortion rights in 2016 shows we have a long way to go," she says.



Tom
Schweich

POLITICS

CAMPAIGN CASUALTIES?

In Missouri's political landscape, where there are no limits on campaign contributions, did a personal-attack ad lead to the suicide of a leading candidate for a governorship?



FILM

SACHA BARON COHEN IS BACK

The *Borat* star talks about his new movie, *The Brothers Grimsby* (in theaters March 11th), in which he plays a crazed soccer hooligan who teams up with a British spy.

360 DEGREES OF COUNTRY

Come to Rolling Stone Country for daily news, video and reviews on Nashville and beyond. In our regular series "The Ram Report," we talk to country rockers A Thousand Horses about their greasy new single "Southernality," their ACM Awards nomination and the influence of Lynyrd Skynyrd on their contemporary Southern-rock sound. Powered by Ram.

ALL THIS AND MORE AT
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Horses'
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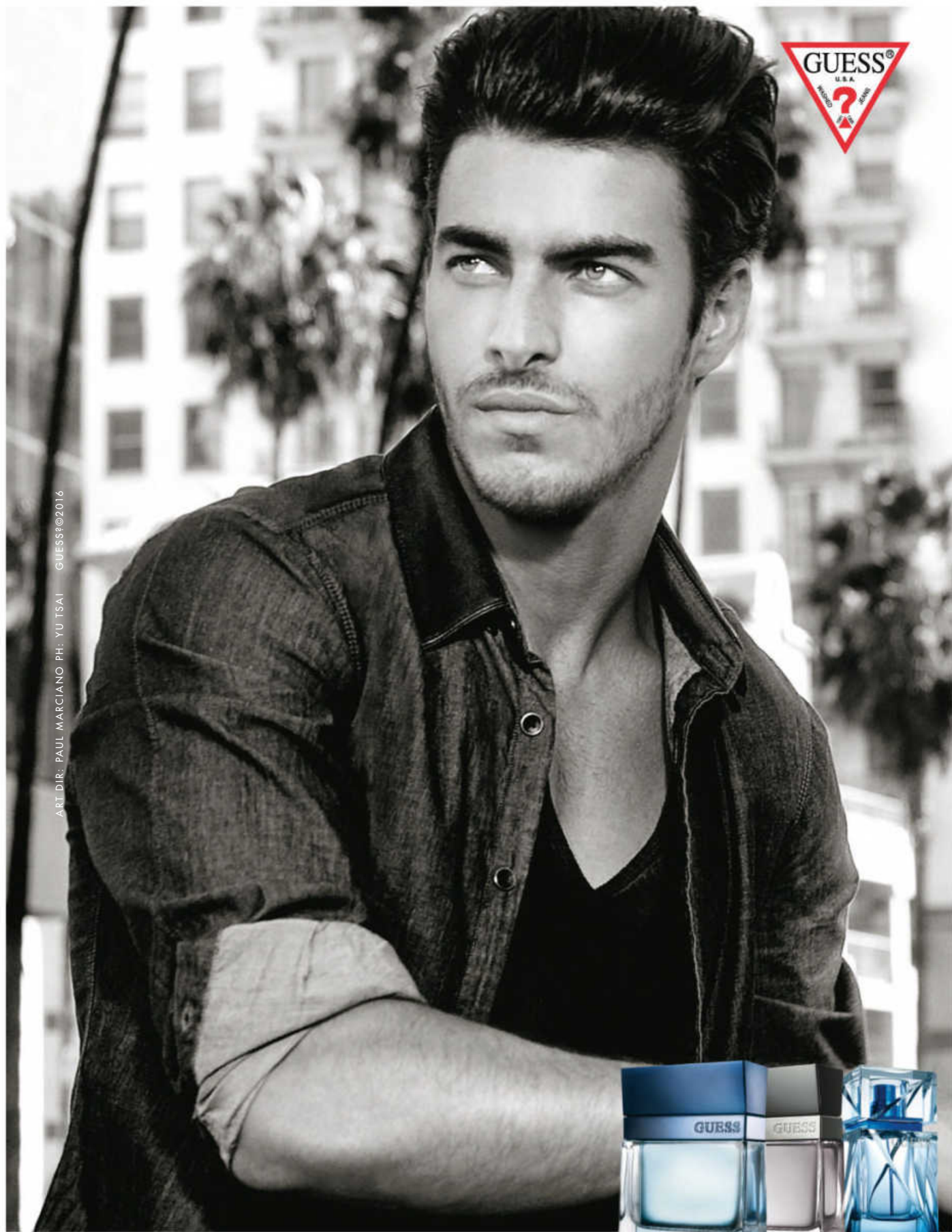
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The Starman

MIKAL GILMORE'S SWEEPING David Bowie cover story was a touching tribute to the man who may have sold the world but left it entirely too soon ["David Bowie, 1947-2016," RS 1254]. By weaving Bowie's personal history with his unparalleled recordings, Gilmore reminds us that we lost a hero, a rebel, a duke and Lady Stardust on January 10th, 2016.

Marty Kiener, Eden Prairie, IN

IT WAS A JOY TO READ BRIAN Hiatt's piece on Bowie ["The Final Years," RS 1254]. Bowie was the ultimate precursor to all of my heroes – Damon Albarn, Brandon Flowers, Madonna. Not even Gaga could have existed without him. Hiatt's article gave me closure on his passing.

Norbert Kozma, Duedin, FL

IT'S SURREAL THAT JUST A few issues ago I was celebrating Bowie's return. Even after reading Tony Visconti's statement that Bowie would probably never tour again, I continued to hope. Bowie was creating throughout his final days, probably his way of processing what was to come. As an artist, he challenged, entertained and amazed, but I really didn't know how brave he was.

Teresa Groat, Chicago

THE BOWIE ISSUE IS ONE we'll treasure for years. Bowie

Glenn Frey, 1948-2016

In RS 1254, contributors Cameron Crowe and David Browne remembered legendary Eagles founder Glenn Frey, who died on January 18th ["The Heart of an Eagle" and "The Long Run"]. ROLLING STONE readers responded.

HAVING JUST FINISHED the two memorial pieces on Glenn Frey, I was reminded of the terrific performer and songwriter he was. Generous, funny, his own man and the driving force behind the Eagles – it's way too soon for him to be gone.

*Jim Kunkler
San Luis Obispo, CA*

HEARTBREAKING TO read about Frey's lifelong health issues. That he continued to write and perform while suffering made me admire him even more. They make 'em tough in Detroit.

*Bob Stewart
Via the Internet*

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR the wonderful Glenn Frey piece by the great Cameron Crowe. It was perfect, including the description of Frey's party technique: "Two beers back-to-back, then one every hour and 15 minutes." What a time they must be having in rock & roll heaven.

*Barbara Gill
Redding, CA*

managed his death as he managed his glorious life: as the coolest person in the universe.

Coreen Steinbach, Pompey, NY

Poisoned Waters

BRAVO TO STEPHEN RODRICK for his heartbreaking story ["Who Poisoned Flint, Michigan?" RS 1254]. When the dust settles on the numerous investigations of this disaster, there will undoubtedly be a long list of individuals and agencies that

I CAN'T RECALL A BIGGER blow than the passing of Bowie and Frey. I wondered how ROLLING STONE would handle it. You came through with one of the



greatest and saddest issues ever. Thanks for more than properly eulogizing these two rock & roll greats.

Robert Long, Hesperia, CA

MY SYMPATHY TO BOWIE fans, but the Eagles are the soundtrack of my life. R.I.P., Glenn, you deserved the cover.

*Jayne Sergeant
Ashland, KY*

dropped the ball, but none of this will undo the terrible long-term damage to the citizens of Flint. Could there be a more tragic reminder of the importance of environmental regulation or the need to protect our resources?

*Andi Simmons
Zionsville, IN*

RODRICK EXPLAINED EVERYTHING about the Flint water crisis that other media failed to. For that, I thank you. For my

brothers and sisters on the other side of the mitten, our prayers are with you.

Lee Lamberts, Jenison, MI

WHEN ARE AMERICANS going to wake up and realize Republicans don't care about anybody except billionaires? Now the big, bad federal government and Obama have to come in and rescue them.

JorgeGeorge Paez, Austin

Fox News Fraud

A FRAUD ON FOX NEWS? WHY does that not surprise me ["The Rise and Fall of a Fox News Fraud," RS 1254]? A fair and balanced manipulation of the truth by a lying scoundrel? Fox should be ashamed. Great reporting, Reeves Wiedeman.

Rick Thorum, Midvale, UT

Bringing the Funk

LOVED THAT IN THE INTERVIEW with Ice Cube [Q&A, RS 1254] he remembers that when he first heard "Fame," he thought David Bowie was black because the song was "so funky." Bowie's ability to reach so many people made him the legend he was.

*Ashley Paskill
Hatfield, PA*

Hinds Are Deers

TOTALLY CHARMED BY THE Hinds story ["Hinds: Late Nights, Loud Guitars," RS 1254]. Their attitude about making music and their blithe reaction to having to change their name made me love them even more.

Dan Lee, via the Internet

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The Playlist

OUR FAVORITE SONGS, ALBUMS AND VIDEOS RIGHT NOW



1. Beyoncé "Formation"

Great news for Beyoncé fans: She's been on a roll since 2013, and she's not slowing down. Her latest world-class club banger doubles as a powerful statement of black Southern resilience. In the era of #BlackLivesMatter, "Formation" feels downright necessary. Her Super Bowl performance, with nods to Michael Jackson and the Black Panthers, was pretty awe-inspiring too. Now, where's that new album?

2. Kanye West "Ultralight Beam"

Opening the tangled-up drama of *The Life of Pablo* with this sincere moment of prayer is a classic Kanye move. It works, too – thanks in part to Chance the Rapper's exuberant, show-stopping guest verse.

3. Weezer "L.A. Girlz"

On their latest single, Rivers Cuomo and Co. bring the power-pop crunch and the lonely-guy vibes like the Blue Album was only yesterday. It hits all the right sweet spots.

4. Wild Nothing "A Woman's Wisdom"

Dreamy L.A. synth-pop dude Jake Tatum nails the Hall and Oates feel on this blissed-out tribute to a loyal partner: "I don't believe in heaven, but maybe you can be my church."



5. Beck "The Man Who Sold the World"

Beck joined Nirvana's surviving members for a spellbinding live take on the Bowie classic they covered on *MTV Unplugged*. It's a must-see on YouTube.

6. Courtney Barnett "Three Packs a Day"

Yes, she lost at the Grammys. But this absurdly catchy garage-pop nugget about ramen noodles (really!) should cheer up anyone who was rooting for our favorite Aussie singer-songwriter.



7. 2 Chainz & Lil Wayne "Rolls Royce Weather Everyday"

Ever wish your life was more like 2 Chainz's? Us too, especially after hearing his and Weezer's delightful ode to living large.



MY LIST



Alice Cooper

Five Songs I Wish I'd Written

The godfather of shock rock is touring America with Hollywood Vampires and his solo group throughout this year.

Nirvana
"Smells Like Teen Spirit"
Had I been born later, I could have written this. But when you're my age, you can't write for teens. When I first heard it, I was like, "Oh, yeah!"

Aerosmith
"Dude (Looks Like a Lady)"
They wrote this about Vince Neil. Mötley Crüe were a bunch of good-looking girls then. They aren't so cute anymore.

My Chemical Romance
"Teenagers"
I looked at this band as the next Def Leppard. This song has a great message: "Teenagers are dangerous!"

Billy Talent
"Red Flag"
These guys were Canada's Green Day. This song reminds me of "My Sharona." It's one of those hooks you can't explain.

Twisted Sister
"We're Not Gonna Take It"
This has the same melody as "O Come All Ye Faithful." It was a bull's-eye for the PMRC [Parents Music Resource Center] thing that was happening then.



THE AMERICANS

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Rock & Roll

Weezer Find the Spirit of the '90s

Rivers Cuomo aims to reclaim his early magic on new LP

BY ANDY GREENE

AS RIVERS CUOMO began writing his latest batch of Weezer songs, his producer, Jake Sinclair, asked what it would take to get back into the mindset that produced the band's classic first two albums. "I need to get out of the house," Cuomo replied. He ended up doing way more. He grew back the beard he wore when the band recorded 1996's *Pinkerton*. He started watching young surfers at Venice Beach in hopes of finding lyrical inspiration. He even signed up for Tinder – for purely platonic [Cont. on 14]

OLD SCHOOL

Cuomo last year in Burbank, California

KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES



VETERANS ON A MISSION
Weezer in September

[Cont. from 13] purposes. "My wife's cool with it," Cuomo says with a shrug.

The result is the band's fourth self-titled LP, destined to be known as the White Album, thanks to a cover image that shows the band near a lifeguard tower on a white beach. The imagery mirrors the sound and lyrics of summery album tracks like "L.A. Girlz," "Wind in Our Sail" and "Summer Elaine and Drunk Dori." "There's so many freaky people at Santa Monica and Venice Beach, and I wanted to capture as much of that as I could," says Cuomo. "Of course, there's always the uplifting, sing-along melodies and the crunchy guitars."

Cuomo and his producer went through a backlog of 250 songs, but only one, "California Kids," made the album. The 30-year-old Sinclair, determined to return Weezer to their Nineties glory, thought they needed to push harder. "Sonically, I wanted the record to have all the brashness and unpredictability of *Pinkerton*," says the producer, who once fronted a Weezer cover band before working with Fall Out Boy, 5 Seconds of Summer and many others, "with the summer Beach Boys grunge pop of the Blue Album."

Early in the process, Cuomo watched Sinclair use Tinder to meet women and became fascinated by the concept. He set up his own profile. "My description says, 'Not looking to hook up, just trying to have new experiences and get some ideas for songs,'" says Cuomo. He began using it to alleviate boredom on tour, meeting men and women alike. "I'm not superexcited to talk to people who know that I'm in Weezer," he says. "It's more exciting when I find people that are interested in me as a person. When I'm in a city I'm not total-

ly familiar with, I can meet someone on Tinder and they can take me around."

"I knew there was zero chance of him hooking up with anybody," says Sinclair. "But he started constantly getting out of the house and writing down all the details of what happened to him." (Annotating his lyrics on the website Genius, Cuomo acknowledged Tinder's sexual side. "I'm so jealous of the hooker-uppers," he wrote.)

Cuomo is looking forward to playing the album tracks live this summer. "We worked hard to get here," he says. "But this is where you want to be, as a band - about to go on a giant tour with 10,000 people there every night singing along. We've got a song on the radio, and I feel superinspired."

Now 45 and a father of two, Cuomo is also at peace with the quirks that fueled his angsty lyrics. "I feel like I'm very different from everyone," he says, "but I'm still very social. I find myself in all kinds of mismatched situations, whether I'm on tour with metal bands, or at Harvard, or in a meditation center, or at home with my family, or hanging out with kids at the beach. I'm not sure I really belong anywhere, but I like being everywhere."

Cuomo can see keeping the band going until he's 60, after which he plans to retire and "try other things." "When I was a senior in high school, one of our assignments was to lay out our life plan," he recalls. "I said I would be a rock star until I was 40, then a classical composer, and then novelist. I was going to commit suicide at age 60, like Maude from *Harold and Maude*. My psychology teacher said, 'When you get to be that age, you might change your mind.'" And has he? "Oh, yeah."

"Whether I'm in metal bands or at Harvard, I'm not sure I belong anywhere," Cuomo says. "But I like being everywhere."

STUDIO NOTE

OUT OF THE DORM ROOM, INTO THE STUDIO

Car Seat Headrest's Will Toledo wrote most of the 2015 LP *Teens of Style* as an angsty college kid. The follow-up, *Teens of Denial* (out late spring), takes his psych-pop vision to new heights, with a sharp-edged sound abetted by Seattle producer Steve Fisk. "My viewpoint has changed a lot since the songs started," Toledo says. "I was feeling much bleaker about life at the time."



Toledo

DE LA SOUL'S BIG, GUEST-PACKED BLOWOUT

For their first LP in 12 years, the Kickstarter-funded *And the Anonymous Nobody*, the rap trio went all in, recording with a live band, L.A.'s Rhythm Roots Allstars, and getting assists from Damon Albarn, Usher, Snoop Dogg, Jill Scott, Pete Rock, Estelle and even David Byrne. "He's asking me for my opinions?!" says Posdnuos. "I'm like, 'You're fucking David Byrne! You shit on the track, it's good!'"



De La Soul

GARBAGE GET SERIOUS (AND ROMANTIC)

The last Garbage album, 2012's *Not Your Kind of People*, was the band's first in seven years. But, determined to avoid another huge hiatus, Garbage got back into the studio as soon as their 2013 tour wrapped. The result, this summer's *Strange Little Birds*, is "an adult record," Shirley Manson reveals. "It's not a pop, frilly, fun, frivolous, frothy thing." Manson explores uncharted lyrical territory: "I've never written about love or fragility or vulnerability. I wanted to address that."



FROM TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: SEAN MURPHY; CHONA KASINGER; ROBBIE JEFFERS; TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES

Maurice White, 1941-2016

The founder and leader of Earth, Wind & Fire was an unstoppable force in R&B

SEVENTEEN YEARS AGO, Wyclef Jean found himself in the studio with one of his heroes, Earth, Wind & Fire founder and mastermind Maurice White. At that time, White, who died February 4th at his home in Los Angeles at age 74, after years of battling Parkinson's disease, was showing early signs of the debilitating nervous-system disorder. "He was moving slow, and you could see it was taking a toll on him," Wyclef recalls. "But his brain was very sharp, and I got so many stories out of him. He told me, 'Give the audience an experience. If you give them an experience, you got them for the rest of their life.'"

During their heyday, Earth, Wind & Fire were a commercial juggernaut, releasing nine platinum albums, scoring 15 Top 40 hits and winning six Grammys. But thanks to White – who had a major role in producing and writing their records as well as singing and playing percussion and kalimba, a thumb piano – EWF were an experience unlike any other in pop or R&B, combining unstoppable grooves with one-world uplift and over-the-top stage spectacle. "I couldn't even imagine an Afri-



SHINING STAR
White,
performing
in 1988

can-American band sounding like that and saying the things they were saying," says lead singer Philip Bailey, who joined the band a few years into its run. "All that came from Maurice."

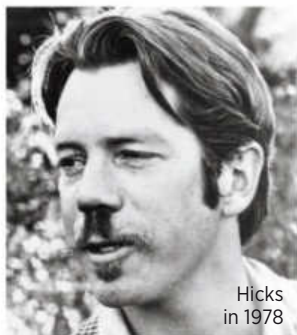
Born in Memphis, White eventually moved with his mother to Chicago, where he studied at a conservatory and drummed on Chess Records sessions. He relocated to Los Angeles in 1969. His younger brother Verdine, who played bass, glimpsed the future when Maurice invited him out to join the nascent EWF. "He saw music changing," says Verdine. "You had rock & roll and Hendrix and the hippies. Maurice did a total flip." Hits like "Shining Star" and "September" pulled in both white and black audiences, and EWF's concerts, which included massive spaceships and Egyptian pyramids created with the help of magicians Doug Henning and David Copperfield, were must-see spectacles.

In 1983, EWF disbanded for several years, and White produced tracks for Neil Diamond and Barbra Streisand. In 1992, White was diagnosed with Parkinson's and retired from performing in 1994. The re-formed band continued on with his blessing. In 2000, Earth, Wind & Fire were inducted into the Rock Hall of Fame. "Maurice saw music as a way to make a statement," says Bailey. "He didn't see it as just a way to become popular or make a whole lot of money." **DAVID BROWNE**

Dan Hicks, 1941-2016

The San Francisco rock pioneer forged a style all his own

DAN HICKS WAS PRESENT FOR THE creation of San Francisco rock & roll – and then pushed beyond it, into an idiosyncratic cabaret-folk style all his own. Hicks, who died February 6th in Mill Valley, California, from throat and liver cancer at age 74, started his career playing drums in the Charlatans, a Bay Area band that predated the Grateful Dead. But his next group, Dan Hicks and His Hot Licks, was his quirkiest and most influential. Hicks' songs and the Hot Licks' melding of jazz, Western swing and Andrews Sisters harmonies, rejected psychedelia in favor



Hicks
in 1978

of pre-rock nostalgia. "It just sounds better to me," Hicks said. "It's not about retro or modern." In 1973, the same year Hicks made the cover of *ROLLING STONE*, he broke up the band. "I couldn't handle success – the modicum I had," he said. Throughout the low-key career that followed, he collaborated with everyone from Elvis Costello and Tom Waits to Bette Midler. "He had a unique take on the energy of rock through the tradition of jazz," says Rickie Lee Jones, who played with him in recent years. "The fringed edges of his personality made his music really cutting edge back in 1974." **D.B.**



LET IT BLEED
The Replacements
in 1985.

The Glorious Chaos of the Replacements

A new biography dives deep into the Eighties punk underdogs' epic, tragic story

THE REPLACEMENTS' CAREER began as it ended: in total disaster. Playing their first show as the Impediments at a sober club hosted by a teen rehab center in St. Paul, Minnesota, they took the stage with 12-year-old bassist Tommy Stinson displaying a cannabis leaf on his instrument; they were caught drinking, ejected and threatened with blacklisting. Sensibly, they changed their name, and the most exciting, self-destructive indie-rock heroes of the Eighties were born.

This sort of tragicomedy defined a band that could be thrilling and poignant on a good night – and on a bad one, a train wreck nearly as awesome. Memphis journalist Bob Mehr vividly charts its bumpy arc through a recent reunion, delivering mythic battle tales like a barroom historian: the vandalized tour vehicles, the couch hurled from a club window, the studio window smashed with a gin bottle while Metallica worked quietly nearby, the endless pranks on music-biz stooges and other cases of self-sabotage, onstage and on-air. It's hilarious, for a while. Less funny are the histories informing the chaos: Molested by his mother's boyfriend, guitarist Bob Stinson spent a childhood in and out of state juvenile facilities; frontman Paul



Westerberg had his first vodka at 13 and attempted suicide with pills at 15. Both men came from families marked by alcoholism, a struggle they inherited and worked out through music that also fueled it.

The 'Mats story has been told many times, but Mehr got unprecedented access (particularly with the famously cantankerous Westerberg), and his reporting gives their hard-luck tales chilling depth: The latter part of Bob Stinson's short life, and the death of his son, is beyond heartbreaking; how Stinson's brother Tommy and Westerberg repeat their own mistakes, echoing the dramas of countless dysfunctional families, is nearly as rough. It certainly makes the band's underdog triumphs feel earned. What Mehr has a harder time capturing are the songs – ache and desperation channeled through, in Westerberg's words, "bubblegum garage music sung by a guy who couldn't sing." It's a typical understatement. But "Answering Machine," "I Will Dare," "Bastards of Young," "Here Comes a Regular" (recorded in a dark studio with colleagues "blinking back tears") and many more document what the fuss is about. This detailed backstory makes them burn anew.

WILL HERMES

Growing Up (and Making Peace) With Hunter S. Thompson

A renegade writer's son reckons with the past



Juan Thompson spent his earliest years playing under the table while his legendary father, Hunter, held court at the Hotel Jerome Bar in Aspen, Colorado. After Hunter committed suicide in 2005, his outlaw myth only grew. But the idolization didn't sit well with his only child. "I love my dad, but that doesn't mean I was blind to his shortcomings," says Juan. Now, at 51, he's written *Stories I Tell Myself*, a book that sheds light on Hunter's life from a fresh, intimate perspective.

Juan, who lives in Denver and has a successful career in IT, follows Hunter from upstart Louisville bad boy to fame at *ROLLING STONE* to later years as his mind and body began to fail him. "Hunter would have appreciated the book," says Paul Scanlon, a longtime *ROLLING STONE* editor. "He knew he was trapped by the parody of himself."

The image that emerges isn't that of a hero or a villain but what Juan calls "a mix." There are some bizarre moments; as a boy, he was sent by his



Hunter S. Thompson with Juan in 2003: "When it flowed, he was happy."

parents on a boating trip with Jimmy Buffett so he wouldn't be around for their explosive fights. Juan and Hunter's relationship improved as Juan built the stable family life he'd yearned for, and working on his own book gave him a new appreciation for his dad's mercurial genius. "When he got something right – when it flowed, when it hit the target – he was so happy," Juan says. "I can better understand that now."

ELISABETH GARBNER-PAUL

FROM TOP: MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY OF JUAN THOMPSON

Jason Isbell's Ragged Glory

Backstage with the singer-songwriter as he talks sobriety, his triumphant tour and how to make roots rock swing

NINETY MINUTES INTO A SOLD-out theater gig in Austin, Jason Isbell dives into the darkest reaches of his back catalog. He and his band, the 400 Unit (which includes his wife, Amanda Shires, on violin), launch into "Danko/Manuel," which Isbell wrote more than a decade ago, when he was a member of the Drive-By Truckers.

On record, it's one of Isbell's most harrowing songs, a shuffling six-minute elegy for two deeply troubled members of the Band. But tonight it becomes a triumphant, 10-minute Southern-rock slow-burner, as Isbell's band amps up the dynamics and stretches every beat, building a thunderous catharsis. It's an emotional knockout – one that Isbell might not have been capable of half a decade earlier.

"I hadn't been onstage sober until about four years ago," Isbell says backstage before the show. "That took some getting used to. But we just did three weeks in Europe, played a cruise and started this tour two days later. If this was 10 years ago, I would be exhausted."

Isbell got clean in 2012 and has been on the rise ever since. His audience, once a cult within the Truckers' cult, exploded with 2013's solo LP *Southeastern* and grew even more with last summer's *Something More Than Free*, which topped the country charts, went Top 10 on the *Billboard* 200 and earned Isbell a slew of praise as a songwriter with a penchant for granular details – including ones about his darker days.

Things just got even better for the 37-year-old: Three nights after the Austin gig, Isbell will win his first two Grammys – one for Best Americana Album and another for Best American Roots Song, for "24 Frames." Isbell credits a post-booze focus on craft for his success. "It's a direct result of spending more time working on the songs and not being dragged away by things that happen after dark," he says.

In Austin, Isbell plays with the easy confidence of a man who knows his career's lucky second act will be better than his already impressive first. His set works over old tunes and shines up new ones. Vintage Truckers songs ("Never Gonna Change," "Decoration Day") turn into Allmans-worthy guitar blowouts. The fan-favorite ballad "Cover Me Up" retains a delicate intimacy, just Isbell and Shires sharing their love.

Isbell has found a crack band to handle his adventurous sets. "I was talking to



MORE THAN FREE Isbell backstage in Austin

Chris Stapleton last week about how hard it is to find a drummer that doesn't beat the shit out of everything all night or a bass player that doesn't wish he was playing guitar," Isbell says. "But I grew up with Chad [Gamble] and Jimbo [Hart], and I thought a more classic R&B kind of rhythm section would work really well with a set that goes from country tunes to rock songs – just give it a little more swing."

Isbell pauses. "It's hard enough to dance to Americana music," he says. "Some nights, when the crowd starts clapping along, I

have to stop them and be like, 'Come on, guys, let's not kid ourselves.'"

Isbell and Shires brought their baby daughter on tour (and Isbell's mother for sitting duties), and Isbell moves a baby seat off a backstage couch before plopping down. "It was really important to me to get to this level," he says. Sleeping on people's floors when you're 22 is fine. But when you get your life in order and have a family you want to keep and a certain level of health, touring bigger means you can keep going for longer."

JOE GROSS

TOUR NOTE

COLDPLAY PLAN A STADIUM SPECTACLE

After staying off the road for more than three years, Chris Martin is charged up for the band's *Head Full of Dreams* tour, which has the group hitting U.S. stadiums for the first time, beginning in July. "I'm getting into a rhythm," he says. "I've cut down on the doughnuts. And I've done loads of exercise."

Martin

You can't do these things without working your ass off." Martin promises an "awesome" production spectacle, inspired by

Beyoncé and U2 shows he caught during the band's downtime ("They raised the bar"), when he was questioning how to move Coldplay forward. "I'm happy that we've stuck together. We're excited to tour and just to be in this absolute dream world for the foreseeable future."

PATRICK DOYLE

BOTTOM: FRANK MICELOTTA/PICTUREGROUP

Bonnie Raitt's New Morning

How the singer-songwriter overcame personal loss and made her first album with new songs in a decade

BY PATRICK DOYLE

I LOVE THAT DOUBLE-TIME shit!" says Bonnie Raitt, grinning behind a piano. The singer-guitarist has just led her longtime band through a furious impromptu take on Ray Charles' "Mess Around." Raitt, 66, has a reputation as a tenacious perfectionist, but today at her rehearsal studio in North Hollywood, she's loose and mischievous. At one point, she sets aside a sheet of lyrics for a new ballad to prove she doesn't need them – but then breaks up laughing when she can't remember the first line. "So much for losing the training wheels!" she says.

After practice, Raitt heads down a hallway deeper into the studio; there's a chore she's been meaning to get around to. Her guitar tech opens a big, musty locker packed with old instruments. "This is over 30 years of people laying guitars on us," she says. She opens a case to reveal an acoustic Jackson Browne gave her, and another containing a guitar that belonged to songwriter Stephen Bruton, a close friend who died in 2009. "I'd been meaning to go through these for years and figure out whether to give them to charity, or what," she says. "But then I moved away and my family got sick."

Raitt is referring to a painful time that began with the deaths of her parents (she lost her mother in 2004, her father a year later); in 2009, her brother died after an eight-year battle with brain cancer. "I was really depleted," she says. "You go back and relive your relationships with those people, and when there's multiple losses and illnesses, it can be almost overwhelming." After her brother's death, Raitt, who tours year-round and plans her career in five-year stretches, told her band she was taking a year off. She started seeing a grief counselor and, for the first time since she hit the road in 1970, watched all four seasons change in her Marin County backyard. "I needed to take some time to sit down and fall apart," she says. That reflective period – and the joy she found when she returned to the road in 2011 – shaped Raitt's new album, *Dig in Deep*, her first LP with newly written songs in more than

a decade. "I have always felt so sorry that I couldn't be a better this or that for my family members," she says. "And I know they were probably just as sorry I couldn't be what they would've liked me to be."

Raitt has lived in Northern California since 1991, but she feels at home in L.A. She grew up on Mulholland Drive, not far from her rehearsal space, the daughter of actor John Raitt, who had lead roles in *Carousel* and *Oklahoma!* during the golden age of Broadway in the 1940s and 1950s. She fondly recalls hour-and-a-half school bus rides through the San Fernando Valley and attending Quaker meetings with her parents, whose love of music and social justice helped draw her to the blues: "It became an anomaly when I was 18 or 19 – people would say, 'Isn't this odd that a little redheaded daughter of a Broadway singer from Los Angeles is playing Robert Johnson songs?'"

Raitt kicks back on a worn-in couch with a piece of double-chocolate cake, which she ordered for her bassist's birthday. "Mmm, tastes like gluten!" she says, eating it straight off a napkin. Someone mentions that the Rolling Stones are rehearsing nearby, and Raitt recalls how she took a semester off from Harvard to tag along on the Stones' 1970 European tour (Raitt was dating the manager of opening act Buddy Guy). She missed class registration on the road, and her parents, angry, stopped supporting her. "That's why I started playing," she says. "I had to make a living. I've got the Stones to thank for it!" At 23, she landed back in Laurel Canyon, becoming a regular on the L.A. club scene with friends like Tom Waits and Little Feat. "We all sang and played on each other's records and hung out, dated each other," she recalls. "We'd start at the Troubadour and then go to somebody's house to keep the party running."

Raitt is approaching her 30th year of sobriety. She started attending AA meetings in the mid-Eighties after losing her

deal with longtime label Warner Bros. and going through a difficult breakup. Her first "sober album," 1989's *Nick of Time*, was a multiplatinum success that won her three Grammys. "I remember the change in her when she stopped drinking," says Browne. "It was like she just flipped a switch and this power happened in her."

Raitt is still a big draw on what she calls "the Americana circuit." She adds, "My end of the music business doesn't rely so much on looks. It allows you to age more gracefully than the mainstream pop stars that are total babes. People are snarkier about them getting older. It's just terrible. So I'm actually relieved that I'm in the character-actress end of the world, where I can just get more seasoned and people go, 'Oh, well, look how mythical she's become!'"

Most days, at home, Raitt spends mornings hiking with friends, and then works from her home office with a staff of four. She has touring down to a science, looking online for hotel deals and doing her laundry at theaters with washers and dryers. Today, she's wearing motorcycle

boots with zippers – she doesn't ride, but they're easier to get off at airport security. Raitt's tour dates often include benefits for progressive causes, like safe energy and campaign-finance reform. She also finds time for the romantic relationship she's been in for more than a decade, her longest since her eight-year marriage to actor Michael O'Keefe ended in 1999. "It's not a joined-at-the-hip relationship," she says. "I like my independence. I have a full life."

In March, she'll begin a two-year tour. She's already planning daytime adventures like seeing music at New Orleans Jazz Fest and exploring old railroad tracks that have been converted to bike paths along the East Coast.

"They're usually under a canopy of trees or along a river, so it's really beautiful," she says, smiling. "You get to see a lot more when you're up in the daytime."

"I was really depleted," says Raitt. "When there are multiple losses and illnesses, it can be almost overwhelming."



NICK OF TIME
Raitt in Santa
Monica in
December



Does Gold Still Shine?

The RIAA just changed the criteria for gold records – but do they cheapen the accomplishment?

FOR 58 YEARS, GOING GOLD WAS a simple matter: Sell 500,000 copies of your album or single, get a shiny record to hang on your wall. But thanks to new guidelines the Recording Industry Association of America introduced in early February, it just got easier – and more complicated.

Now, along with actual sales, the formula factors in listens on streaming services, as well as YouTube plays, and counts 10

digital-track downloads as the equivalent of one album sold; 1,500 plays on Spotify, Apple Music, Tidal or any other streaming service now count as one album sale, meaning that an LP with 750 million streams would be credited with a gold record. (The rule changes only affect albums; the RIAA began taking into account streaming data for gold and platinum singles in 2013.)

The changes had an immediate effect. Albums like Kendrick Lamar's *To Pimp a*

Butterfly, Miranda Lambert's *Platinum* and Hozier's self-titled LP went from gold to platinum instantly, even though they had not reached the 1 million in sales that were previously required. Midlevel acts like Elle King and Alt-J also became gold-plated success stories overnight. So far, the RIAA has certified 29 new gold or platinum albums under the new rules. This includes previously certified albums that jumped to the next level – like *Thriller*, which leaped from 30 to 32 times platinum.

The RIAA's new math reflects a sea change in listening habits. Streaming revenue grew from \$500 million in 2012 to more than \$1 billion in 2014. Ten years ago, 90 percent of the albums on *Billboard*'s Top 200 sold enough copies to go gold or platinum; in 2014, just 30 percent of them did the same. *Billboard* updated its charts to include streaming data in 2014.

"We can't be the same program we were 58 years ago, and even three years ago," says Liz Kennedy, the RIAA's gold and platinum director. "We'll have to continue to adjust over time." Peter Paterno, attorney for Dr. Dre, Metallica and Van Morrison, adds, "If they stick to [sales], they're not going to have any charts in five years. If you don't include streaming, you're not painting an accurate picture of what's going on."

Not everybody is thrilled with the new rules. Larry Stessel, a former executive for major labels Sony, Mercury and EMI, says, "Streaming, to me, is no different than radio airplay, so to count it in a certification on sales doesn't make any sense. It makes it less meaningful. There are still artists like Adele who can sell 8 million copies."

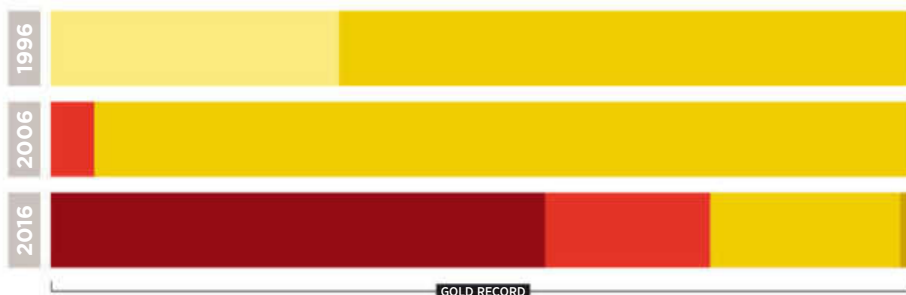
Even harsher was Anthony Tiffith, owner of Lamar's label, Top Dawg Entertainment, who called the RIAA's decision "bs." He summed up his feelings in a tweet after *To Pimp a Butterfly* got its status bump: "Ole skool rules apply. 1 million albums sold is platinum. Until we reach that #, save all the congrats." **STEVE KNOPPER**

What's in a Gold Record? Three Different Eras

Under the RIAA's new rules, it still takes 500,000 sales to score a gold album, and 1 million for platinum. But now, 1,500 streams count for one album sold (as do 10 digital-track sales). Here's a breakdown of what went into a typical gold record in 1996, 2006 and this year.

■ Cassettes ■ CDs ■ Vinyl LPs
■ Digital downloads ■ Streaming

Estimates based on Nielsen SoundScan numbers



Phil Collins

The singer on the critics who hate him, the rappers who love him and why he's also a little sick of 'Sussudio'

BY ANDY GREENE



Collins circa 1985

FOR A LONG TIME, Phil Collins was everybody's punching bag. Old-school Genesis fans blamed him for turning the group away from its prog-rock roots. Critics dismissed his 1980s hits as derivative schlock, and the fans he won that decade largely turned away from him in the 1990s. "People assess you by your hits," he says, lounging in the master bedroom of his Miami Beach mansion. "So when the radio plays 'Against All Odds' or fuckin' 'Separate Lives' again and again, they become your flagship."

But now, Collins, 65, is having the last laugh: A new generation is discovering his music, and artists from Lorde to Pharrell Williams have cited him as a major influence. (Adele even reached out to him about co-writing songs for 25.) "They don't have the bias that we all grew up with," says Collins, who, with 150 million albums sold, is one of the top-selling artists of all time. "When people stop thinking about you, you can be rediscovered."

A decade ago, upset at his declining reputation, and struggling with a drinking problem and a nasty divorce, Collins retired from public life. But there's good news on that front too: Collins recently quit drinking and has decided to "unretire" and record new songs. In January, he started reissuing his solo albums in deluxe packages – a perfect occasion to take us through 15 highlights from a nearly 50-year career. "I'm proud of what I did," he says, "but also a little ashamed of the things that happened along the way."

“‘In the Air Tonight’ has become a stone around my neck. NFL players use it to work out, and it was just in an ad for milk chocolate. But I’m not complaining – it paid for this house we’re in right now!”

A Hard Day’s Night (the Beatles) 1964

I got the chance to be in the audience when the Beatles filmed *A Hard Day’s Night*. They wanted kids that were screaming, and I just sat still, which is probably why I was cut out of the film. Thirty years later I was asked to narrate a documentary about the movie. I got to go through the outtakes, and I found a guy wearing a pin tie that looked just like me, sitting completely still. I remember thinking, “For crying out loud, will you stop screaming? Let’s listen to the music!”

Art of Dying (George Harrison) 1970

In 1969, I was playing drums in a band called the Herd. One night, our managers called me and said, “You want to go down to Abbey Road?” I said, “I’m a bit busy, I’ve just had a bath.” And they said, “Well, it’s for George Harrison.” I went, “I’ll get a cab.” I walked in and there was Ringo Starr, Billy Preston, Phil Spector, Klaus Voorman, Badfinger, [guitarist] Pete Drake, [Beatles road manager] Mal Evans and George. Spector was introduced in this brusque way. He was like, “Who is this young guy, thinks he can play with the Beatles?”

They wanted me to play congas. After 90 minutes, I had blood blisters. They took a break, and then Ringo’s chauffeur came and said, “You’re finished.” When *All Things Must Pass* came out, I looked through the credits and there was no mention of me. They used a different version of the song.

For Absent Friends (Genesis) 1971

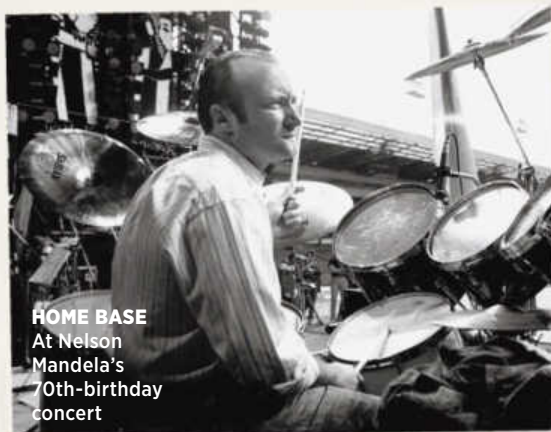
Steve [Hackett] and I joined Genesis a few months after my *All Things Must Pass* soiree. Tony [Banks], Mike [Rutherford] and Peter [Gabriel] were the writers. But Steve and I wrote this sort of classical piece that I haven’t heard, frankly, for God knows how many years. It was the first time I ever sang on a Genesis record.

Follow You, Follow Me (Genesis) 1978

I was a drummer. I sang in my school groups in the mid-1960s, but I really didn’t



INVISIBLE TOUCH
Fronting Genesis on their 1987 world tour



HOME BASE
At Nelson Mandela’s 70th-birthday concert

want to be a singer. I took over after Peter left because I had the voice. But I had nothing to do with “Follow You, Follow Me.” It was written around a guitar piece by Mike. Tony wrote the words, which I didn’t hear until the day I went in to record them.

It was our first real hit. Genesis had been trying desperately to write pop singles for a long time. Everybody was a fan of the Beatles and the Kinks and the Stones, but we didn’t have a very good editor in the band – it was hard to write songs shorter than 10 minutes. But “Follow You, Follow Me” was a game-changer.

Because I had become the singer a couple of albums earlier, I was given the blame [for the band’s new pop direction]. Suddenly, there was this guy that not only can

sing and play drums, but he’s been to drama school! Fans thought, “He’s probably Mr. Showbiz and he’s pushed Pete out.” It wasn’t like that at all, but it makes a better story. The truth is, we grew up. We matured.

In the Air Tonight 1981

This song has become a stone around my neck, though I do love it. I wrote it after my wife left me. Genesis had done a tour that was far too long. She said to me, “We won’t be together if you do the next tour.” I said, “I’m a musician. I have to go away and play. Just hold your breath when I’m over there.” Then Genesis toured Japan. When I got back, she said she was leaving and taking the kids.

At the time, Genesis had decided to change things up a bit, maybe rattle our cages. The idea was to record separately with these new Roland drum machines we’d been given. I set up a studio in the master bedroom of my house with a Fender Rhodes piano and a drum kit.

One day I was working on a piece in D-minor, the saddest [key] of all. I just wrote a sequence, and it sounded nice. I wrote the lyrics spontaneously. I’m not quite sure what the song is about, but there’s a lot of anger, a lot of despair and a lot of frustration.

Tony Banks claims I never played him the song, but I don’t see why that would be true. But

I’m glad he didn’t take it, because Genesis would have put their mark on it, and it wouldn’t be the piece of music we’re talking about now.

Nobody knows what the song is about, and I kind of like the mystery. And now NFL players use it to work out. I saw a video recently of Steph Curry singing it in his car, and it was just in an ad for milk chocolate. Where will it end? But I’m not complaining. It paid for this house we’re in right now!

I Don’t Care Anymore 1982

If my first album [*Face Value*] was “I’m divorced and I’m miserable,” my next one was “I’m going to kick this fucker to bits.” By this point, I was getting letters from lawyers asking for unbelievable things. I

“The hip-hop brigade fell in love with me after ‘Easy Lover.’ They were like, ‘That ain’t black music and that ain’t white music. That’s kind of an interesting color of beige.’”

never sat down and wrote, “You’re a bitch.” I went to school with my wife. I have a huge amount of affection for her.

Against All Odds 1984

This is another song that’s been a ring around my neck. It was written around the same time as “In the Air Tonight,” but I discarded it. A couple of years later, I was asked to write a song for the movie called *Against All Odds*. I was really hot at the time, and they said, “Have you got a song for this movie of ours?” I said, “I’m not able to do it on the road, but I have a demo of this ballad.” It was basically like saying, “Here’s \$10 million. Would you want it?”

I had already written the lyrics, before I saw the film. When I think about the movie, the first thing that comes to mind is the size of Rachel Ward’s breasts. I thought they were fantastic. I like Jeff Bridges, too.

Easy Lover 1984

I always loved Earth, Wind & Fire, and in 1984 I was asked if I would produce Philip Bailey’s solo album. People were leaning on him, racially – “Don’t come back with a white album. You’re one of us.” So Philip got Nathan East to play on it also. We hit some rocky ground early on, but we worked everything out. Near the end of the sessions, Philip said, “We haven’t written anything together on this album.”

So we just started having a jam one night, and went round and round and turned it into a verse and a chorus. We recorded it that night so we wouldn’t forget it. That song doesn’t sound like any particular era. It’s just fantastic. The hip-hop brigade fell in love with me after “Easy Lover.” They were like, “Where’d that come from? That ain’t black music and that ain’t white music. That’s kind of an interesting color of beige.”

Sussudio 1985

Why do you have to bring me down by asking about this one? It’s from one of my least-favorite records, *No Jacket Required*. I wanted to work with different people at the time, people that could do things I wasn’t capable of doing. So I got ahold of Dave Frank [from the New York synth-pop duo the System], and I said, “Do you fancy having a go at this?” And he programmed the whole song. There’s a killer horn section.

At the time, I wasn’t being *me*. I’ve grown up a bit now and much prefer to play songs that are me. I only play a bit part in that one.

Invisible Touch (Genesis) 1986

This is one of my favorite Genesis songs. There was a Sheila E. record out at the time, I think it was *Glamorous Life*, and I wanted to write my own version of that. I had decided to stay in the band even though my solo career had taken off. When you’re in a band, it’s family. There’s the road crew and their families to think

does he mean that he can’t dance?” They didn’t see the humor, and it killed the fun.

A few years later, I was doing promo for my [solo] album *Both Sides*. I told my manager, “I think I’ve done enough [with Genesis]. I’m living in Switzerland and I’m really happy domestically.” All bands dissolve. They aren’t meant to last forever.

You’ll Be in My Heart (from the soundtrack to Disney’s ‘Tarzan’) 1999

This part of my career has always baffled my fans. They go, “What the fuck has Disney to do with Phil Collins and Genesis?” But I grew up with Disney films in my life. People without kids may not understand. The whole experience was a thrill for me, and I won an Oscar for Best Song. But with or without the glory, I would have taken the experience.

Home (Bone Thugs-N-Harmony) 2002

Bone Thugs-N-Harmony called me up and said, “We’ve done a version of your song ‘Take Me Home’ and we’d like you to be in the video.” I said, “No, I’m not in America.” They said, “They can come wherever you are.” I said, “Don’t make me say, ‘No, fuck off.’” But then I heard the song, and I quite liked it, and they agreed to come to Geneva. How could I disappoint these guys? They were nice lads.

My songs are often sampled by rappers, and it’s deeply flattering, but I’m easily flattered. The [1996] *Urban Renewal* album [where hip-hop artists like Lil Kim and Ol’ Dirty Bastard covered Collins tunes] was also very flattering. It shows that people outside the U.K. have minds of their own.

Going Back 2010

I had wanted to record an album of covers since I started making music. I could do Beatles covers, but Motown covers... that’s where I live. It’s a bit of a karaoke album. When you hear “Uptight,” you want to hear Stevie Wonder come in and sing. But it’s like, “It’s my record. I can do what I want.”

I retired years ago, but I am now officially unretired. My new studio arrived yesterday. I just need to wire it up, which will be another month or so. I’ve got a couple of ideas of people to work with. If people show interest in these reissues, it would be silly not to make more music.



FATHER PHIL Collins with sons Matthew and Nicholas (from left) at a Knicks game in 2015

about. If you just flippantly say, “I’m leaving,” they’re like, “We’ve just bought a house with a mortgage.” You can’t do that to people.

Another Day in Paradise 1989

This is one I got a lot of flak for because I’m a multimillionaire. It was inspired by an incident in Washington, D.C. We were driving around in a limo and I saw all these boxes on Capitol Hill. It was snowing, and I said, “What’s going on here? Is there some sort of demonstration?” Someone said, “No, that’s where these people live.” I just thought, “This is one of the wealthiest countries in the world. How can this happen?” It put a bee in my bonnet.

I Can’t Dance (Genesis) 1991

This began as a guitar riff of Mike’s. We’d all taken our Fine Young Cannibals pills, imitating the way that Roland Gift sings, and joking about jeans commercials. It’s not about being unable to dance. It’s about guys that look good but can’t string a sentence together. Each verse is a piss-take at the scenario of a jeans commercial. It was good fun, but the audience thought, “What

WHEN FALL OUT BOY reunited in 2013 after a four-year hiatus, they called their comeback album *Save Rock and Roll*. Tongue-in-cheek as that title may have been, the Chicago foursome are doing their part, bringing a radically revamped, sample-laden version of their pop-punk sound to radio (most recently with the *Munsters*-sampling “Uma Thurman” and the Demi Lovato duet “Irresistible”) – and, in March, to U.S. arenas. “I definitely don’t want rock to be a diorama in a museum,” says bassist-lyricist Pete Wentz, now a father of two. “Like, ‘These cavemen used to be cool.’ So thank god we’re sonically different from 10 years ago.”

You attended Kanye West’s album-debut event. What did you think?

It’s awesome that he was like, “I’m going to introduce my fashion line and do a listening party at Madison Square Garden,” and then he *does* it. He sees the couch and then builds the couch! You guys moved past your original sound and are making hits again. Is it fair to say that Fall Out Boy are in their Eighties-Nineties Aerosmith phase?

Dude, it’s so wild that you said that. I was just talking with my friend about what a rad period of Aerosmith that was, and I was thinking about that comparison in some ways too. But I feel like we’re also in the catcher’s gear/kilt/NFL-jersey Axl era. The ideas can just get weirder right now. **What is it like being one of the few rock bands with pop success right now?**

It’s strange when it feels a little like being on an island. And it’s still a constant fight. Some of my friends are like, “It seems so easy for you guys, getting songs on the radio and stuff.” I’m like, *I wish you knew*. When we first played “Uma Thurman” for Top 40 radio, it was like the look on the face of a puppy when they don’t understand the command. But there are cool moments. We played a pretty heavy Australian festival, Soundwave, and we felt like oddballs. Then Rob [Halford] from Judas Priest sits down at our trailer, and he’s like, “That ‘Irresistible’ video is so good.” We’re like, “What the fuck?” **You recently hung out with 5 Seconds of Summer in Bali. How does it feel when they treat you guys as elder statesmen?**

I went up to MC Hammer last night, and I’m like, “Dude, I love your music.” He’s like [*doubtfully*], “Yeah, right.” It’s the same thing: I find it hard to believe when people say that stuff to me. I feel like they’re messing with me. Someone came up to me the other day and said,

Q&A



Pete Wentz

The Fall Out Boy bassist-lyricist on aging gracefully, ‘Star Wars,’ attending Kanye’s release party, and hanging out with 5SOS

BY BRIAN HIATT

“I play drums because of Andy Hurley and what he did on ‘Sugar, We’re Goin’ Down,’” which is mind-blowing. With the 5SOS guys in Bali, I came out to the pool and they were listening to crazy butt-rock, like Poison. I was like, “Have you guys heard of, like, Refused and At the Drive-In?” They’re like, “No.” So I made them a playlist, and it’s cool to be able to do that. They were pretty into it. But maybe they were appeasing me.

How are you coping with turning 37 this year?

In a good, like, 70 percent of my life, my age really makes sense – like when I’m at school assemblies. And I’m on the young side of the parents there. But it does make me think, what are the next steps for our band? We’re in such an in-between thing. We’re not a legacy act, and we’re not in this echelon of bands that automatically plays the halftime show. We’re not there yet. And that’s OK. There’s still more for us to do. How do we play Wrigley Field? How do we headline festivals?

Did you talk to the Green Day guys about this stuff when you guys inducted them into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame?

First of all, Tré Cool is a really funny guy or whatever. We were next to them while they were making their speeches, and he kept moving his statue so the light reflected off it into our eyes. He thought that was pretty rad. But we sat with them and heard how they came up with “Boulevard of Broken Dreams” at that point in their career and how they made the Broadway musical. It’s important to hear these guys who’ve aged pretty gracefully talk about their paths.

Will there ever be a back-to-basics Fall Out Boy album?

When we got back together, we hadn’t recorded since laptop culture happened with people like Diplo. We were adapting to that. I’d love to do a back-to-basics, four-of-us-in-a-room album. But I’ve seen bands try it, and they can’t get there. They’re not hungry enough. They’ve experienced the world in a different way. And I don’t want it to be out of fear where we *have* to go recapture this thing. You can’t. Whatever it was, was some kind of magic.

Finally, as *Star Wars* superfans, is there a band consensus on Rey’s parentage?

The amount of *Star Wars* and *Game of Thrones* debates that happen in the van on the way to airports is insane. At one point, we had some wishful thinking that Rey’s dad was Obi-Wan, but the timeline doesn’t make sense. So everyone is thinking Luke.

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The Plot to Save JFK

How Stephen King and James Franco came together to adapt a massive book into a killer miniseries

BY ANDY GREENE

WHEN STEPHEN KING FIRST got the idea for a story about a teacher who goes back in time to save John F. Kennedy's life, it was 1971 and he was a high school teacher unable to get published outside of softcore-porn magazines like *Cavaliere* and *Gent*. "I was teaching school, and one day in the teachers room I thought,

11.22.63, HULU

'Jeez, wouldn't it be cool if somebody could go back and stop the assassination?'" King says. "But I decided the history research would be too much for a high school teacher, so I shelved it."

It would take 40 years for King to publish the book, *11/22/63*, but it was worth the wait. *The New York Times* named it one of the five best fiction books of 2011, and it sold by the millions. Soon, Jonathan Demme began adapting it into a movie script, but there was a problem: King came to believe that the story could only be brought to life as a miniseries. So J.J. Abrams took it over, bringing the show to Hulu.

None of this news reached James Franco, who was busy preparing for oral exams in the English department at Yale. "I had to be familiar with 150 books," he says. "A lot of them were academic. When I finished, I was finally able to read whatever I wanted. I remember seeing *11/22/63* at an airport bookstore or something. When I read it, I got this gut feeling, a tingle, that it could be something more." He e-mailed King and inquired about the rights, only to hear Abrams had beaten him to it. But an essay Franco wrote about the book for *Vice* got the attention of the producer, who offered Franco the lead role. "I said, 'I'm totally in as long as I can direct a little,'" says Franco. "He said, 'No problem!' And that was it."

Adapting the book – which focuses on a divorced high school teacher who finds a time portal to 1958 and spends five years plotting to save JFK – into an eight-episode series fell to playwright-screenwriter Bridget Carpenter. One of her first moves was to introduce a sidekick, since Franco's character is alone for much of the story. "Unless you do a voice-over," she says, "you're looking at a man staring out a window."

The series was shot mostly in Toronto, with some trips to the assassination site



Sarah Gadon and Franco in *11.22.63*

in Dallas. For King, who had veto power over the script, cast and most aspects of production, it was important the series not present a fantasy version of the JFK era. "There's a Camelot afterglow that hangs around with people my age," King says. "I thought, 'Let's not romanticize this too much.' It wasn't all rock & roll and poodle skirts."

If the show does well, it could pave the way for an adaptation of King's fantasy series *The Dark Tower* – possibly split between movies and TV miniseries, an unprecedented move. "We're living in the golden age of TV," King says. "There's more than any one person could reasonably watch. It's just this glorious buffet. And I love it."

ALEX DUKAV/HULU



ON NEWSSTANDS 2/12/16

The Broads Are Back in Town

The best comedy on TV keeps getting funnier as the stoner sisters of 'Broad City' dig deeper and get more depraved

BY ROB SHEFFIELD

BROAD CITY" ISN'T JUST THE funniest comedy on TV, it's a way of life. Abbi Jacobson and Ilana Glazer are true senseis for the rest of us. They might seem like just two New York stoner chicks who spend all their time talking dirty or vaping or pretending to be Lil Wayne. But they face life with their own "carpe daaay-umm" philosophy. These two broads are so into each other, their BFF chemistry can turn any ordinary nothing

BROAD CITY WEDNESDAYS, 10 P.M., COMEDY CENTRAL

day into a world-pegging adventure. Part of their secret is how much they love giving compliments constantly; everywhere they go, it's the place to be, and they shower it with praise. They don't just give compliments to each other ("You're my favorite little Jewie this side of St. Louie!") or even to neighbors ("Fierce shoulder pads – date night?") but also to those who despise and insult them. When people try to cut Abbi and Ilana down to size, it doesn't work, because these two barely even notice; they just keep gushing with enthusiasm. They face the cold, cruel world with a "yas queen."

In the superb new season, the broads venture boldly into areas we've never seen them in before: the DMV, the organic-food co-op, the boxing ring, extended jokes involving Phish. They also go to places they've always been before: lounging in bed, eating cold pizza, raving about how lucky the world is to have them around raising hell.



BAD GIRLS
Abbi (left) and Ilana hit new comedic highs.

The whole cast thrives on their chemistry: Hannibal Buress as Ilana's long-suffering boyfriend, Chris Gethard as her longer-suffering boss, Nicole Drespel as her sufferingest co-worker. When a visitor at the office asks, "What do you do here?," Ilana doesn't hesitate: "Total transparency – I spent most of the day coloring in my tummy."

The third season has new guest-star faces like Alan Alda, Melissa Leo, Vanessa Williams and – astoundingly – Hillary Clinton, who clearly recognizes a pair of queens when she sees them. *Broad City*

might have originally seemed like a simple recipe – stoner-bro comedy with stoner sisters – but each season gets funnier and punchier. The episode where Abbi deals with her mega-competitive side at the Soulstice games is an instant classic. Only Ilana knows how to put her BFF in a half nelson and soothingly talk her down: "OK, Yankee Candle Store, vanilla bean, BB&B when it opens, 8 a.m., just you and the employees." Even when they try to chill out on a regular human level, they're on their own level. Stay high, ladies.



MARRIED WITH CHILDREN
Lynskey and Duplass

The Duplass Bros Tackle Sex and Midlife

TOGETHERNESS
SUNDAYS, 10:30 P.M., HBO

Togetherness manages to make comedy gold out of some extremely unpromising materials – namely, a foursome of pale neurotics pushing 40 in L.A., trying to figure out where their lives went so horribly wrong. Besides everywhere. Mumblecore pioneers Mark and Jay Duplass make *Togetherness* a slow-burning comic delicacy, with film sound designer Brett (Mark) and

Michelle (Melanie Lynskey) as a miserable married couple who have to face the single slob in their lives: his moronic pal Alex (Steve Zissis) and her wild sister Tina (Amanda Peet), who realizes she might be running out of dudes to bang on Tinder. This season brings new heartbreaks – even for Alex, who's finally making it as an actor but has a new girlfriend who says things like, "I'm going to have an orgasm here in the next 10 minutes. You just let me know if you're involved in that."

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RandomNotes



Taylor: Watch the Throne

The last time Taylor Swift was up for a Grammy, her album *Red* lost Album of the Year to Daft Punk. "I remember not going to the afterparties and went home, and I cried a little bit," she said, "and I got In-N-Out Burger and ate a lot." This year went better: Swift took home the night's biggest honor (beating out buddy Kendrick Lamar, above), threw shade at Kanye West in her acceptance speech, then went dancing with her squad (including Lorde and Haim) at Republic Records' afterparty until 2 a.m. "Oh, what a night!" Swift said.



LET 'EM IN!
After some confusion when he was turned away from Tyga's afterparty, Paul McCartney and wife Nancy Shevell went to Republic Records' bash, dancing to "FourFiveSeconds" and Bowie songs.



IT'S LOVE, NO DOUBT
Gwen Stefani and Blake Shelton spent Valentine's Day at Clive Davis' pre-Grammy party; in March, Stefani will release her first new solo album in a decade.



The Weeknd looked innocent with Ed Sheeran, but cops later booted 1,000 guests from his house party.



Funk Brothers

"Let's go, Beyoncé! Let's do this!" yelled Bruno Mars from the crowd as she read the nominees for Record of the Year. Sure enough, Mark Ronson and Mars' megahit "Uptown Funk" took it home. "To get it from the queen made it even more epic," said a beaming Ronson.



CARRY ON, CROZI!
David Crosby, at the MusiCares gala, filled Lenny Kravitz in on the two solo albums he's currently making. "Man, he is still writing some beautiful songs!" says Kravitz.

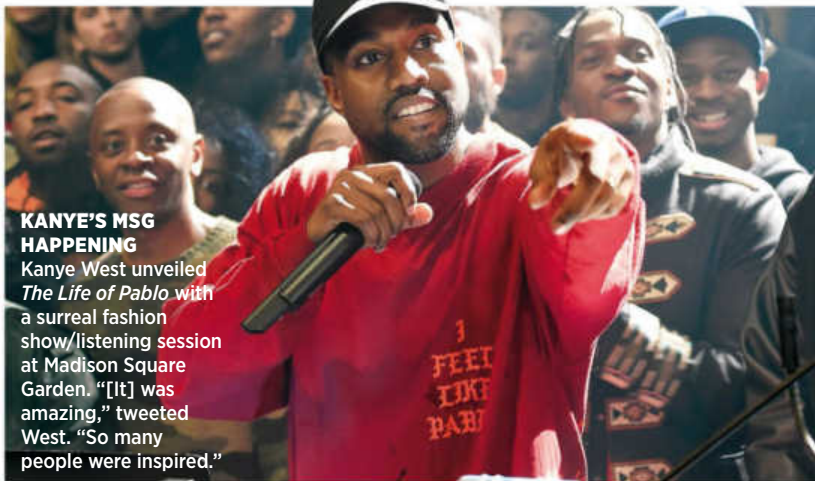


PRESERVATION GROHL JAZZ BAND
Dave Grohl fell in love with Preservation Hall Jazz Band when they collaborated in New Orleans: "I went through fuckin' withdrawal after I left!" They reunited for a second-line procession at the Grammys.



GAGA FOR BIEBS

Lady Gaga and Justin Bieber sat in the front row at Saint Laurent's fall L.A. runway show. "I'm putting out an album this year!" Gaga said. "I won't tell you when."



KANYE'S MSG HAPPENING

Kanye West unveiled *The Life of Pablo* with a surreal fashion show/listening session at Madison Square Garden. "[It] was amazing," tweeted West. "So many people were inspired."



Eagles Return to Paris

Three months after the attack on their show at Paris' Bataclan club, Eagles of Death Metal returned to Paris for a show that included 900 survivors and relatives of those killed. Frontman Jesse Hughes led the crowd through 89 seconds of silence for the victims, then said, "We are here to have a good time tonight. Ain't nobody gonna stop us."



Avicii Wakes Up

Avicii has been laying low for the past six months. "I needed to take a step back and start eating well and exercising," he says. He returned to light up ROLLING STONE's Super Bowl party in San Francisco for a crowd including Usher and Shaggy. "It was the perfect show!" says Avicii, who's in the studio working on his follow-up to 2015's *Stories*.



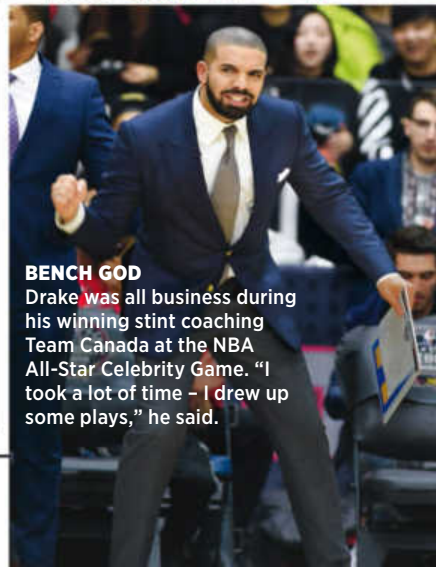
LOVIN' THE MAC

Courtney Love hit the stage at L.A.'s Fleetwood Mac Fest to croon "Silver Springs." "I always steal from Stevie anyway," she's said.



Adele Sets Fire to L.A.

Adele warmed up for her arena tour with an intimate show at L.A.'s Wilton Theatre for fan-club members only (OK, plus famous fans Katy Perry, John Mayer and Tom Hanks). Adele was blown away by the huge crowd of well-wishers gathered outside her dressing room. "I feel like Justin Bieber!" she shouted.



BENCH GOD

Drake was all business during his winning stint coaching Team Canada at the NBA All-Star Celebrity Game. "I took a lot of time - I drew up some plays," he said.

President Trump, Seriously

He's no ordinary con man. He's way above average – and the American political system is his easiest mark ever

By Matt Taibbi

THE FIRST THING YOU NOTICE at Donald Trump's rallies is the confidence. Amateur psychologists have wishfully diagnosed him from afar as insecure, but in person the notion seems absurd.

Donald Trump, insecure? We should all have such problems.

At the Verizon Giganto-Center in Manchester the night before the New Hampshire primary, Trump bounds onstage to raucous applause and the booming riffs of the Lennon-McCartney anthem "Revolution." The song is, hilariously, a cautionary tale about the perils of false prophets peddling mindless revolts, but Trump floats in on its grooves like it means the opposite. When you win as much as he does, who the hell cares what anything means?

He steps to the lectern and does his Mussolini routine, which he's perfected over the past months. It's a nodding wave, a grin, a half-sneer, and a little U.S. Open-style applause back in

the direction of the audience, his face the whole time a mask of pure self-satisfaction.

"This is unbelievable, unbelievable!" he says, staring out at a crowd of about 4,000 whooping New Englanders with snow hats, fleece and beer guts. There's a snowstorm outside and cars are flying off the road, but it's a packed house.

He flashes a thumbs-up. "So everybody's talking about the cover of *Time* magazine last week. They have a picture of me from behind, I was extremely careful with my hair..."

He strokes his famous flying fuzz-mane. It looks gorgeous, like it's been recently fed. The crowd goes wild. *Whoooo! Trump!*

It's pure camp, a variety show. He singles out a Trump impersonator in the crowd, tells him he hopes the guy is making a lot of money. "Melania, would you marry that guy?" he says. The future first lady is a Slovenian model who, apart from Trump, was most famous for a TV ad in which she engaged in a Frankenstein-style body transfer with the Aflac duck, voiced by Gilbert Gottfried.





Trump Nation

The billionaire at a rally in Lowell, Massachusetts, this year. His events have the feel of a *Jerry Springer* episode.

She had one line in that ad. Tonight, it's two lines:

"Ve love you, New Hampshire," she says, in a thick vampire accent. "Ve, together, ve vill make America great again!"

As reactionary patriotic theater goes, this scene is bizarre – Melania Knauss didn't even arrive in America until 1996, when she was all of 26 – but the crowd goes nuts anyway. Everything Trump does works these days. He steps to the mic.

"She's beautiful, but she's more beautiful even on the inside," he says, raising a finger to the heavens. "And, boy, is she smart!"

Before the speech, the PA announcer had told us not to "touch or harm" any protesters, but to instead just surround them and chant, "Trump! Trump! Trump!" until security can arrive (and presumably do the touching and/or harming).

I'd seen this ritual several times, and the crowd always loves it. At one event, a dead ringer for John Oliver ripped off his shirt in the middle of a Trump speech to reveal body paint that read "Eminent Domain This!" on his thorax. The man shouted, "Trump is a racist!" and was immediately set upon by Trump supporters, who yelled "Trump! Trump! Trump!" at him until security arrived and dragged him out the door to cheers. The whole Trump run is like a *Jerry Springer* episode, where even the losers seem in on the gags.

In Manchester, a protester barely even manages to say a word before disappearing under a blanket of angry boos: "Trump! Trump! Trump!" It's a scene straight out of *Freaks*. In a Trump presidency, there will be free tar and feathers provided at the executive's every public address.

It's a few minutes after that when a woman in the crowd shouts that Ted Cruz is a pussy. She will later tell a journalist she supports Trump because his balls are the size of "watermelons," while his opponents' balls are more like "grapes" or "raisins."

Trump's balls are unaware of this, but he instinctively likes her comment and decides to go into headline-making mode. "I never expect to hear that from you again!" he says, grinning. "She said he's a pussy. That's terrible." Then, theatrically, he turns his back to the crowd. As the 500 or so reporters in attendance scramble to instantly make this the most important piece of news in the world – in less than a year Trump has succeeded in turning the USA into a massive high school – the candidate beams.

What's he got to be insecure about? The American electoral system is opening before him like a flower.

In person, you can't miss it: The same way Sarah Palin can see Russia from her house, Donald on the stump can see his fu-

ture. The pundits don't want to admit it, but it's sitting there in plain view, 12 moves ahead, like a chess game already won:

President Donald Trump.

A thousand ridiculous accidents needed to happen in the unlikeliest of sequences for it to be possible, but absent a dramatic turn of events – an early primary catastrophe, Mike Bloomberg ego-crashing the race, etc. – this boorish, monosyllabic TV tyrant with the attention span of an Xbox-playing 11-year-old really is set to lay waste to the most impenetrable oligarchy the Western world ever devised.

It turns out we let our electoral process devolve into something so fake and dysfunctional that any half-bright con man with the stones to try it could walk right through the front door and tear it to shreds on the first go.

And Trump is no half-bright con man, either. He's way better than average.

It's been well-documented that Trump surged last summer when he openly embraced the ugly race politics that, according to the Beltway custom of 50-plus years, is supposed to stay at the dog-whistle level.

What's Trump got to be insecure about? The American electoral system is opening before him like a flower.

No doubt, that's been a huge factor in his rise. But racism isn't the only ugly thing he's dragged out into the open.

Trump is no intellectual. He's not bringing *Middlemarch* to the toilet. If he had to be in jail with Stephen Hawking for a year, he wouldn't learn a thing about physics. Hawking would come out on Day 365 talking about models and football.

But, in an insane twist of fate, this bloated billionaire scion has hobbies that have given him insight into the presidential electoral process. He likes women, which got him into beauty pageants. And he likes being famous, which got him into reality TV. He knows show business.

That put him in position to understand that the presidential election campaign is really just a badly acted, billion-dollar TV show whose production costs ludicrously include the political disenfranchisement of its audience. Trump is making a mockery of the show, and the Wolf Blitzers and Anderson Coopers of the world seem appalled. How dare he demean the presidency with his antics?

But they've all got it backward. The presidency is serious. The presidential electoral process, however, is a sick joke, in which everyone loses except the people behind the rope line. And every time some pundit or party spokesman tries to deny it, Trump picks up another vote.

THE NINTH REPUBLICAN DEBATE, in Greenville, South Carolina, is classic Trump. He turns these things into WWE contests, and since he has actual WWE experience after starring in *Wrestlemania* in 2007, he knows how to play these moments like a master.

Interestingly, a lot of Trump's political act seems lifted from bully-wrestlers. A clear influence is "Ravishing" Rick Rude, an Eighties champ whose shtick was to insult the audience. He would tell ticket holders they were "fat, ugly sweat hogs," before taking off his robe to show them "what a real sexy man looks like."

In Greenville, Donald "The Front-Runner" Trump started off the debate by jumping on his favorite wrestling foil, Prince Dinkley McBirthright, a.k.a. Jeb Bush. Trump seems to genuinely despise Bush. He never misses a chance to rip him for being a "low-energy," "stiff" and "dumb as a rock" weenie who lets his Mexican wife push him around. But if you watch Trump long enough, it starts to seem gratuitous.

Trump's basic argument is the same one every successful authoritarian movement in recent Western history has made: that the regular guy has been screwed by a conspiracy of incestuous elites. The Bushes are half that conspiratorial picture, fronts for a Republican Party establishment and whose sum total of accomplishments, dating back nearly 30 years, are two failed presidencies, the sweeping loss of manufacturing jobs, and a pair of pitiable Middle Eastern military adventures – the second one achieving nothing but dead American kids and Junior's re-election.

Trump picks on Jeb because Jeb is a symbol. The Bushes are a dissolute monarchy, down to offering their last genetic screw-up to the throne.

Jeb has taken the high road for most of the past calendar year, but Trump has used his gentlemanly dignity against him. What Trump understands better than his opponents is that NASCAR America, WWE America, always loves seeing the preening self-proclaimed good guy get whacked with a chair. In Greenville, Trump went after Jeb this time on the issue of his brother's invasion of Iraq.

"The war in Iraq was a big f...fat mistake, all right?" he snorted. He nearly said, "A big fucking mistake." He added that the George W. Bush administration lied before the war about Iraq having WMDs

Contributing editor MATT TAIBBI wrote about the GOP campaign in November.



Vicious Campaign

(1) Trump has dominated with a chokehold on 25 to 40 percent of the Republican vote. (2) Rubio stumbled badly after Iowa. (3) At the South Carolina debate, Trump called Cruz “a liar.” (4) Bush (with his brother) has been on the defensive after Trump turned him into a symbol of a corrupt system.



One GOP strategist put it this way: “Maybe 34 [percent] is Trump’s ceiling. But 34 in a five-person race wins.”

The numbers simply don’t work, unless the field unexpectedly narrows before March. Trump has a chokehold on somewhere between 25 and 40 percent of the Republican vote, scoring in one poll across every category: young and old, educated and less so, hardcore conservatives and registered Democrats, with men and with women, Megyn Kelly’s “wherever” notwithstanding. Trump the Builder of Anti-Rapist Walls even earns an estimated 25 percent of the GOP Latino vote.

Moreover, there’s evidence that human polling undercounts Trump’s votes, as people support him in larger numbers when they don’t have to admit their leanings to a live human being. Like autoerotic asphyxiation, supporting Donald Trump is an activity many people prefer to enjoy in a private setting, like in a shower or a voting booth.

THE PATH TO UNSEATING Trump is consolidation of opposition, forcing him into a two- or three-person race. Things seemed headed that way after Iowa, when Ted Cruz won and Marco Rubio came in third.

Rubio’s Iowa celebration was a classic. The toothy Floridian

leaped onstage and delivered a rollickingly pretentious speech appropriate not for a candidate who just eked out wins in five Iowa counties, but for a man just crowned king of Jupiter.

“For months, they told us because we offered too much optimism in a time of anger, we had no chance,” he thundered. Commentators later noted Rubio’s language was remarkably similar to Barack Obama’s florid “they said our sights were set too high” 2008 Iowa victory speech.

The national punditry predictably overreacted to Rubio’s showing, having been desperate to rally behind a traditional, party-approved GOP candidate.

Why do the media hate Trump? Progressive reporters will say it’s because of things like his being crazy and the next Hitler, while the Fox types insist it’s because he’s “not conservative.” But reporters mostly loathe Trump because he regularly craps on other reporters.

He called Fox’s Kelly a period-crazed bias monster for asking simple questions about Trump’s past com-

and that we spent \$2 trillion basically for nothing.

Days earlier, Trump had gleefully tweeted that Bush needed his “mommy” after Jeb appeared with Lady Barbara on a morning show.

Jeb now went straight into character as the Man Whose Good Name Had Been Insulted. He defended his family and took exception to Trump having the “gall” to go after his mother.

“I won the lottery when I was born 63 years ago and looked up and I saw my mom,” Jeb said proudly and lifted his chin. America loves Moms. How could he not win this exchange? But he was walking into a lawn mower.

“My mom is the strongest woman I know,” Jeb continued.

“She should be running,” Trump snapped.

The crowd booed, but even that was phony. It later came out that more than 900 of the 1,600 seats were given to local and national GOP officials. (Trump mentioned during the debate that he had only

his wife and son there in comparison, but few picked up on what he was saying.) Pundits, meanwhile, lined up to congratulate Jeb for “assailing” Trump – “Bush is finally going for it,” *The New York Times* wrote – but the exchange really highlighted many of the keys to Trump’s success.

Trump had said things that were true and that no other Republican would dare to say. And yet the press congratulated the candidate stuffed with more than \$100 million in donor cash who really did take five whole days last year to figure out his position on his own brother’s invasion of Iraq.

At a time when there couldn’t be more at stake, with the Middle East in shambles, a major refugee crisis, and as many as three Supreme Court seats up for grabs (the death of satanic quail-hunter Antonin Scalia underscored this), the Republican Party picked a strange year to turn the presidential race into a potluck affair. The candidates sent forth to take on Trump have been so incompetent they can’t even lose properly.

ments about women, and launched a weirdly lengthy crusade against little-known *New Hampshire Union-Leader* publisher Joseph McQuaid for comparing Trump to *Back to the Future* villain Biff Tannen. He even mocked the neurological condition of *Times* reporter Serge Kovalski for failing to ratify Trump's hilariously fictional recollection of "thousands" of Muslims celebrating after 9/11, doing an ad hoc writhing disabled-person impersonation at a South Carolina rally that left puppies and cancer kids as the only groups untargeted by his campaign. (He later denied the clearly undeniable characterization.)

But Trump's thin-skinned dealings with reporters didn't fully explain the media's efforts to prop up his opponents. We've long been engaged in our own version of the high school put-down game, battering nerds and outsiders like Ron Paul and Dennis Kucinich while elevating "electable," party-approved candidates like John McCain and John Kerry.

Thus it was no surprise that after Iowa, columnists tried to sell the country on the loathsome "Marcomentum" narrative, a paean to the good old days when reporters got to tell the public who was hot and who wasn't – the days of the "Straight Talk Express," "Joementum," etc.

"Marco Rubio Was the Real Winner in Iowa," blared CNN. "Marco Rubio's Iowa Mojo," chimed in Politico. "Forget Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio Is the Real Winner of the Iowa Caucuses," agreed *Vanity Fair*.

Rubio, we were told, had zoomed to the front of the "establishment lane" in timely enough fashion to stop Trump. Of course, in the real world, nobody cares about what happens in the "establishment lane" except other journalists. But even the other candidates seemed to believe the narrative. Ohio Gov. John Kasich staggered out of Iowa in eighth place and was finishing up his 90th lonely appearance in New Hampshire when Boston-based reporters caught up to him.

"If we get smoked up there, I'm going back to Ohio," he lamented. Kasich in person puts on a brave face, but he also frequently rolls his eyes in an expression of ostentatious misanthropy that says, "I can't believe I'm losing to these idiots."

But then Rubio went onstage at St. Anselm College in the eighth GOP debate and blew himself up. Within just a few minutes of a vicious exchange with haranguing now-former candidate Chris Christie, he twice delivered the exact same canned 25-second spiel about how Barack Obama "knows exactly what he's doing."

Rubio's face-plant brilliantly reprised Sir Ian Holm's performance in *Alien*, as a malfunctioning, disembodied robot head stammering, "I admire its purity," while

covered in milky android goo. It was everything we hate about scripted mannequin candidates captured in a brief crack in the political façade.

Rubio plummeted in the polls, and Kasich, already mentally checked out, was the surprise second-place finisher in New Hampshire, with 15.8 percent of the vote.

"Something big happened tonight," Kasich said vaguely, not seeming sure what that thing was exactly. Even worse from a Republican point of view, Dinkley McBush somehow finished fourth, above Rubio and in a virtual tie with Iowa winner Ted Cruz.

Now none of the three "establishment lane" candidates could drop out. And the next major contest, South Carolina, was deemed by horse-race experts to have too tiny an "establishment lane" vote to decide which two out of that group should off themselves in time for the third to mount a viable "Stop Trump" campaign.

All of which virtually guarantees Trump will probably enjoy at least a five-horse race through Super Tuesday. So he might

The press went gaga for Rubio after Iowa because he's the unthreatening, cliché-spouting phony they have always approved of.

have this thing sewn up before the others even figure out in what order they should quit. It's hard to recall a dumber situation in American presidential politics.

"If you're Trump, you're sending flowers to all of them for staying in," the GOP strategist tells me. "The more the merrier. And they're running out of time to figure it out."

THE DAY AFTER RUBIO'S implosion, Trump is upstate in New Hampshire, addressing what for him is a modest crowd of about 1,500 to 2,000 in the gym at Plymouth State University. The crowd here is more full-blown New England townie than you'll find at his Manchester events: lots of work boots, Pats merch and f-bombs.

Trump's speeches are never scripted, never exactly the same twice. Instead he just riffs and feels his way through crowds. He's no orator – as anyone who's read his books knows, he's not really into words, especially long ones – but he has an undeniable talent for commanding a room.

Today, knowing the debate news is in the air, he makes sure to plunge a finger into Rubio's wound, mocking candidates who need scripts.

"Honestly, I don't have any teleprompters, I don't have a speech I'm reading to you," Trump says. Then he switches into a nasal, weenie-politician voice, and imitates someone reading tiny text from a crib sheet: "Ladies and gentlemen, it's so nice to be here in New Hampshire, please vote for me or I'll never speak to you again..."

The crowd laughs. Trump also makes sure to point a finger at the omnipresent Giant Media Throng.

"See all those cameras back there?" he says. "They've never driven so far to a location."

The crowd turns to gape and sneer at the hated press contingent, which seems glad to be behind a rope. Earlier, Trump had bragged about how these same reporters had begrudgingly admitted that he'd won the St. Anselm debate. "They hate it, but they gave me very high grades."

It's simple transitive-property rhetoric, and it works. The press went gaga for Rubio after Iowa because – why? Because he's an unthreatening, blow-dried, cliché-spouting, dial-surveying phony of the type campaign journalists always approve of.

And when Rubio gets exposed in the debate as a talking haircut, a political Speak n' Spell, suddenly the throng of journalists who spent the past two weeks trying to sell America on "Marcomentum" and the all-important "establishment lane" looks very guilty indeed. Voters were supposed to take *this* seriously?

Trump knows the public sees through all of this, grasps the press's role in it and rightly hates us all. When so many Trump supporters point to his stomping of the carpetbagging snobs in the national media as the main reason they're going to vote for him, it should tell us in the press something profound about how much people think we suck.

Jay Matthews, a Plymouth native with a long beard and a Trump sign, cites Trump's press beat-downs as the first reason he's voting Donald.

"He's gonna be his own man," he says. "He's proving that now with how he's getting all the media. He's paying nothing and getting all the coverage. He's not paying one dime."

Reporters have focused quite a lot on the crazy/race-baiting/nativist themes in Trump's campaign, but these comprise a very small part of his usual presentation. His speeches increasingly are strikingly populist in their content.

His pitch is: He's rich, he won't owe anyone anything upon election, and therefore he won't do what both Democratic and Republican politicians unflinchingly do upon



The Populist Tycoon

Trump may travel to campaign stops on his own plane, but his speeches are increasingly populist as he rails against money in politics, big pharma and insurance companies.

taking office, i.e., approve rotten/regressive policies that screw ordinary people.

He talks, for instance, about the anti-trust exemption enjoyed by insurance companies, an atrocity dating back more than half a century, to the McCarran-Ferguson Act of 1945. This law, sponsored by one of the most notorious legislators in our history (Nevada Sen. Pat McCarran was thought to be the inspiration for the corrupt Sen. Pat Geary in *The Godfather II*), allows insurance companies to share information and collude to divvy up markets.

Neither the Republicans nor the Democrats made a serious effort to overturn this indefensible loophole during the debate over the Affordable Care Act.

Trump pounds home this theme in his speeches, explaining things from his perspective as an employer. "The insurance companies," he says, "they'd rather have monopolies in each state than hundreds of companies going all over the place bidding.... It's so hard for me to make deals...because I can't get bids."

He goes on to explain that prices would go down if the state-by-state insurance fiefdoms were eliminated, but that's impossible because of the influence of the industry. "I'm the only one that's self-funding.... Everyone else is taking money from, I call them the bloodsuckers."

Trump isn't lying about any of this. Nor is he lying when he mentions that the big-pharma companies have such a stranglehold on both parties that they've managed to get the federal government to bar itself

from negotiating Medicare prescription-drug prices in bulk.

"I don't know what the reason is – I do know what the reason is, but I don't know how they can sell it," he says. "We're not allowed to negotiate drug prices. We pay \$300 billion more than if we negotiated the price."

It's actually closer to \$16 billion a year more, but the rest of it is true enough. Trump then goes on to personalize this story. He claims (and with Trump we *always* have to use words like "claims") how it was these very big-pharma donors, "fat cats," sitting in the front row of the debate the night before. He steams ahead even more with this tidbit: Woody Johnson, one of the heirs of drug giant Johnson & Johnson (and the laughably incompetent owner of the New York Jets), is the finance chief for the campaign of whipping boy Jeb Bush.

"Now, let's say Jeb won. Which is an impossibility, but let's say...."

The crowd explodes in laughter.

"Let's say Jeb won," Trump goes on. "How is it possible for Jeb to say, 'Woody, we're going to go out and fight competitively'?"

This is, what – not true? Of course it's true.

What's Trump's solution? Himself! He's gonna grab the problem by the throat and fix it by force!

Throughout his campaign, he's been telling a story about a \$2.5 billion car factory that a Detroit automaker wants to build in Mexico, and how as president he's going to stop it. Humorously, he tried at one point to say he already had stopped it, via his persistent criticism, citing an article on an obscure website that claimed the operation had moved to Youngstown, Ohio.

That turned out to be untrue, but, hey, what candidate for president hasn't impulse-tweeted the completely unprovable fact or two? (Trump, incidentally, will someday be in the Twitter Hall of Fame. His fortune-cookie mind – restless, confrontational, completely lacking the shame/veracity filter – is perfectly engineered for the medium.)

In any case, Trump says he'll call Detroit carmakers into his office and lay down an ultimatum: Either move the jobs back to America, or eat a 35 percent tax on every car imported back into the U.S. over the Mexican border.

"I'm a free-trader," he says, "but you can only be a free-trader when something's fair."

It's stuff like this that has conservative pundits from places like the *National Review* bent out of shape. Where, they ask, is the M-F'ing love? What about those conservative principles we've spent decades telling you flyover-country hicks you're supposed to have?

"Trump has also promised to use tariffs to punish companies," wrote David McIntosh in the *Review's* much-publicized, but not-effective-at-all "Conservatives Against Trump" 22-pundit jihad. "These are not the ideas of a small-government conservative.... They are, instead, the ramblings of a liberal wanna-be strongman."

What these tweedy Buckleyites at places like the *Review* don't get is that most people don't give a damn about "conservative principles." Yes, millions of people responded to that rhetoric for years. But that wasn't because of the principle itself, but because it was always coupled with the more effective politics of resentment: Big-government liberals are to blame for your problems.

Elections, like criminal trials, are ultimately always about assigning blame. For a generation, conservative intellectuals have successfully pointed the finger at big-government-loving, whale-hugging liberals as the culprits behind American decline.

But the fact that lots of voters hated the Clintons, Sean Penn, the Dixie Chicks and whomever else, did not, ever, mean that they believed in the principle of Detroit car-makers being able to costlessly move American jobs overseas by the thousands.

"We've got to do something to bring jobs back," says one Trump supporter in Plymouth, when asked why tariffs are suddenly a good idea.

Cheryl Donlon says she heard the tariff message loud and clear and she's fine with it, despite the fact that it clashes with traditional conservatism.

"We need someone who is just going to look at what's best for us," she says.

I mention that Trump's plan is virtually identical to Dick Gephardt's idea from way back in the 1988 Democratic presidential race, to fight the Korean Hyundai import wave with retaliatory tariffs.

Donlon says she didn't like that idea then.

Why not?

"I didn't like him," she says.

Trump, though, she likes. And so do a lot of people. No one should be surprised that he's tearing through the Republican primaries, because everything he's saying about his GOP opponents is true. They really are all stooges on the take, unable to stand up to Trump because they're not even people, but are, like Jeb and Rubio, just robo-babbling representatives of unseen donors.

BACK IN MANCHESTER, AN American Legion hall half-full of bored-looking Republicans nurses beers and knocks billiard balls around, awaiting Iowa winner Ted Cruz. The eely Texan is presumably Trump's most serious threat and would later nudge past Trump in one national poll (dismissed

by Trump as conducted by people who "don't like me").

But New Hampshire is a struggle for Cruz. The high point in his entire New England run has been his penchant for reciting scenes from *The Princess Bride*, including the entire Billy Crystal "your friend here is only mostly dead" speech for local station WMUR. The one human thing about Cruz seems to be that his movie impersonations are troublingly solid, a consistent B-plus to A-minus.

But stepping into the human zone for even a few minutes backfired. The actor Mandy Patinkin, who played Inigo Montoya in the film, reacted with horror when he learned Cruz was doing his character's famous line "You killed my father, prepare to die." He accused Cruz of deliberately leaving out the key line in Montoya's speech, after he finally slays the man who killed his father: "I've been in the revenge business for so long, now that it's over,

Trump's tearing through the early primaries because what he says about his opponents is true: They really are stooges on the take.

I don't know what to do with the rest of my life."

Patinkin believed Cruz didn't do that line because Cruz is himself in the revenge business, promising to "carpet-bomb [ISIS] into oblivion" and wondering if "sand can glow."

Patinkin's criticism of Cruz cut deeply, especially after the Iowa caucuses, when Cruz was accused by Trump and others of spreading a false rumor that Ben Carson was dropping out, in order to steal evangelical votes and pad his lead.

The unwelcome attention seemed to scare Cruz back into scripted-bot mode, where he's a less-than-enthralled presence. Cruz in person is almost physically repellent. *Psychology Today* even ran an article by a neurology professor named Dr. Richard Cytoiwic about the peculiarly off-putting qualities of Cruz's face.

He used a German term, *backpfeifengesicht*, literally "a face in need of a good punch," to describe Cruz. This may be overstating things a little. Cruz certainly has an odd face – it looks like someone sewed pieces of a waterlogged Reagan mask together at gunpoint – but it's his tone more than anything that gets you. He

speaks slowly and loudly and in the most histrionic language possible, as if he's certain you're too stupid to grasp that *he is for freedom*.

"The... Constitution..., " he says, "serves... as... chains... to... bind... the... mischievous... of... government...."

Four years ago, a candidate like this would have just continued along this path, serving up piles of euphuistic Tea Party rhetoric for audiences that at the time were still hot for the tricorn-hat explanation of how Comrade Obama ruined the American Eden.

But now, that's not enough. In the age of Trump, the Cruzes of the world also have to be rebels against the "establishment." This requirement makes for some almost unbelievable rhetorical contortions.

"Government," Cruz now ventures, "should not be about redistributing wealth and benefiting the corporations and the special interests."

This absurd Swiss Army cliché perfectly encapsulates the predicament of the modern GOP. In one second, Cruz is against "redistributionism," which in the Obama years was code for "government spending on minorities." In the next second, he's against corporations and special interests, the villains du jour in the age of Bernie Sanders and Trump, respectively.

He's against everything all at once. Welfare! Corporations! Special Interests! Government! The Establishment! He's that escort who'll be into whatever you want, for an hour.

Trump meanwhile wipes out Cruz in his speeches in a single, drop-the-mic line.

"They give Ted \$5 million," he says, bringing to mind loans Cruz took from a pair of banks, Goldman Sachs and Citibank.

The total was closer to \$1.2 million, but Trump's point, that even the supposed "outsider" GOP candidate is just another mindless payola machine, is impossible to counter.

THE UNEXPECTEDLY THRILLING Democratic Party race between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, too, is breaking just right for Trump. It's exposing deep fissures in the Democratic strategy that Trump is already exploiting.

Every four years, some Democrat who's been a lifelong friend of labor runs for president. And every four years, that Democrat gets thrown over by national labor bosses in favor of some party lifer with his signature on a half-dozen job-exporting free-trade agreements.

It's called "transactional politics," and the operating idea is that workers should back the winner, rather than the most union-friendly candidate.

This year, national leaders of several prominent unions went with Hillary Clinton – who, among other things, supported her husband's efforts to pass NAFTA – over Bernie Sanders. Pissed, the rank and file in many locals revolted. In New Hampshire, for instance, a Service Employees International Union local backed Sanders despite the national union's endorsement of Clinton, as did an International Brotherhood

Mary Kay Henry even admitted in January that Trump appeals to members because of the “terrible anxiety” they feel about jobs.

“I know guys, union guys, who talk about Trump,” says Rand Wilson, an activist from the Labor for Bernie organization. “I try to tell them about Sanders, and they don't know who he is. Or they've just heard he's a socialist. Trump they've heard of.”

This is part of a gigantic subplot to the

hammers Hillary and compliments Sanders. “I agree with [Sanders] on two things,” he says. “On trade, he said we're being ripped off. He just doesn't know how much.”

He goes on. “And he's right with Hillary because, look, she's receiving a fortune from a lot of people.”

At a Democratic town hall in Derry, New Hampshire, Hillary's strangely pathetic answer about why she accepted \$675,000

from Goldman to give speeches – “That's what they offered” – seemed doomed to become a touchstone for the general-election contest. Trump would go out on Day One of that race and blow \$675,000 on a pair of sable underwear, or a solid-gold happy-face necktie. And he'd wear it 24 hours a day, just to remind voters that his opponent sold out for the Trump

equivalent of lunch money.

Trump will surely argue that the Clintons are the other half of the dissolute-conspiracy story he's been selling, representing a workers' party that abandoned workers and turned the presidency into a vast cash-for-access enterprise, avoiding scrutiny by making Washington into Hollywood East and turning labor leaders and journalists alike into starstruck courtiers. As with everything else, Trump personalizes this, making his stories of buying Hillary's presence at his wedding a part of his stump speech. A race against Hillary Clinton in the general, if it happens, will be a pitch right in Trump's wheelhouse – and if Bill Clinton is complaining about the “vicious” attacks by the campaign of pathological nice guy Bernie Sanders, it's hard to imagine what will happen once they get hit by the Trumpdozer.

THE ELECTORAL ROADSHOW, that giant ball of corrupt self-importance, gets bigger and more grandiose every four years. This time around, there was so much press at the Manchester Radisson, you could have wiped out the entire cable-news industry by detonating a single Ryder truck full of fertilizer.

Like the actual circus, this is a roving business. Cash flows to campaigns from people and donors; campaigns buy ads; ads pay for journalists; journalists assess candidates. Somewhat unsurprisingly, the ever-growing press corps tends in most years to like – or at least deem “most serious” – the candidates who buy the most ads. Nine out of 10 times in America, the candidate who raises the most money wins. And those candidates then owe the most favors.

Meaning that for the pleasure of being able to watch insincere campaign coverage and see manipulative po- [Cont. on 59]

Path to Victory?

Unless more of the GOP establishment candidates drop out, Trump will win the nomination. “If you're Trump, you're sending them flowers,” says one GOP strategist.



of Electrical Workers chapter.

Trump is already positioning himself to take advantage of the political opportunity afforded him by “transactional politics.” He regularly hammers the NAFTA deal in his speeches, applying to it his favorite word, “disaster.” And he just as regularly drags Hillary Clinton into his hypothetical tales of job-saving, talking about how she could never convince Detroit carmakers out of moving a factory to Mexico.

Unions have been abused so much by both parties in the past decades that even mentioning themes union members care about instantly grabs the attention of workers. That's true even when it comes from Donald Trump, a man who kicked off the fourth GOP debate saying “wages [are] too high” and who had the guts to tell the *Detroit News* that Michigan autoworkers make too much money.

You will find union members scattered at almost all of Trump's speeches. And there have been rumors of unions nationally considering endorsing Trump. SEIU president

Trump story, which is that many of his critiques of the process are the same ones being made by Bernie Sanders. The two men, of course, are polar opposites in just about every way – Sanders worries about the poor, while Trump would eat a child in a lifeboat – but both are laser-focused on the corrupting role of money in politics.

Both propose “revolutions” to solve the problem, the difference being that Trump's is an authoritarian revolt, while Sanders proposes a democratic one. If it comes down to a Sanders-Trump general election, the matter will probably be decided by which candidate the national press turns on first: the flatulent narcissist with cattle-car fantasies or the Democrat who gently admires Scandinavia. Would you bet your children on that process playing out sensibly?

In the meantime, Trump is cannily stalking the Sanders vote. While the rest of the GOP clowns just roll their eyes at Sanders, going for cheap groans with bits about socialism, Trump goes a different route. He

Elton John got rejected
by his record label, is
feuding with his mother
and has a couple of
regrets about the 1980s.
So why is he so happy?

By Stephen Rodrick

PHOTOGRAPH BY
SAM TAYLOR-JOHNSON

ELTON JOHN SITS AT A giant red piano left over from his Vegas days, wearing the same brownish Adidas tracksuit I saw him in two days earlier. Today is a Sunday rehearsal at the Wilton Theatre in Los Angeles for the debut show behind his 32nd album, *Wonderful Crazy Night*, and he is jawing with his crew about his vocals. They don't seem to be getting the sound to his liking, so he sings to them in an unrhymed couplet: "You'll know when my tits/Goes up your ass."

Everyone laughs, and then Elton breaks into a few bars from *Oklahoma!* before dropping down to his bass range and crooning lines not from the Rodgers and Hammerstein original: "Why do all the queers come from Tulsa?/Why do all the fairies live in Oklahoma?/I think I'll move there next to you!"

The crew and the band are now giggling, including guitarist Davey Johnstone and drummer Nigel Olsson, who have been playing with Elton for more than 40 years. They work through the playful title track from *Night*. There's some talk with Johnstone as to whether they can get away with six new songs, versus five. Someone tells Elton that the show is going to be 90 minutes long. He shakes his head.

"Let's do two hours," he says. Elton reasons that if he's going to make the crowd sit through half a dozen new ones, he must give a hearty dollop of the hits. The band gets back to work, but before long Elton stops. It's NFL playoff season.

"Does anyone know the Packers-Redskins score?"

Someone reports the score, but Elton barely listens. He's more of a Patriots fan,

The Bitch at Peace



FAMILY MAN

Elton in L.A. in January. He always thought he was "too old, too selfish" to have kids.

because of his friendship with team owner Robert Kraft from their work with Elton's AIDS foundation. During a tea break, Elton says he called Kraft on the field minutes after the Patriots' last-minute interception of Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson gave them their Super Bowl victory last year. "He told me, 'I thought we had lost,'" says Elton. I say that Wilson told me in a *ROLLING STONE* interview that God had let him know it was all part of his plan as he walked to the sideline after the game.

Elton rolls his eyes behind his glasses. "You know what I call that?" He adopts an American accent. "*Bullshit.*"

A call comes in. It's his husband and partner of 23 years, David Furnish, whom the British tabloids and even Elton have nicknamed Yoko for the way he has pushed out much of Elton's longtime inner circle and streamlined matters as de facto manager of Elton John Industries.

"Hello, darling. Things are going well. How are the boys? I'm gonna say good night, since it's late there."

It's time to go back to work, but Elton needs to use the loo. I wait for him and can't help but hear a voice emerging from behind the door. Elton is singing one of his new songs, "Blue Wonderful": "I dive in, I dive deep, I just swim/I lose myself in you/Blue wonderful, blue wonderful, again."

Sir Elton John emerges and heads back to his piano, sipping backstage coffee.

"This is a happy album." He flashes the famous gap-toothed smile. "Because I've never been happier."

'HAPPY DOES NOT MEAN "easy" in the world of Sir Elton John. He'd be the first to admit he is difficult. He laughs when remembering a scene from *Tantrums and Tiaras*, a documentary shot by Furnish in 1995, where Elton is in the South of France and returns to his room in full pout. He calls for his private jet and swears he's never coming back. Why? A woman waved at him from the other side of the court while he was playing tennis. On another occasion, he asked a crony if he could turn down the wind outside his hotel.

"We're all fucking monsters sometimes," says Elton with a laugh at the memory. And there have been challenges to his throne. Capitol Records rejected his current album, forcing him to take it to Island. Yes, he has two sons now, Zachary and Elijah, with Furnish, but he may or may not be speaking to his number-one fan, Sheila Farebrother, a.k.a. his mother. Mrs. Farebrother recently turned 90 and spent her birthday in the company of an Elton John impersonator.

Contributing editor STEPHEN RODRICK wrote about the *Flint* crisis in February.

"It upsets me, but to be honest with you, I don't miss her," Elton says at his Beverly Hills home. "When she says things in the press, like last year: 'I haven't spoken to Elton since he married that fucking asshole David Furnish....'" He shrugs his shoulders, paraphrasing many of her comments since the feud started. "That was pretty hard to take." He sent her flowers for her 90th birthday, but there was no call. "I don't hate my mother," Elton says. "I look after her, but I don't want her in my life."

Elton John is soon to be 69, and he has changed. Sometimes, that can be harder on the entourage and family than on the artist. Gone is his longtime publicist and personal assistant. Gone is Elton's obsessive attention to the pop charts – he knows the time has passed for that – but it's been replaced by advising new talent like Ed Sheeran

"Before I had kids, I wanted to die on the stage. That's all I had. Now I don't. My life has changed."

through his management company. Regrets? He has a few – particularly that he wasn't more on the front lines in the fight against AIDS. He's banished most of his addictions, except for shopping – he has a notebook to keep track of each record, DVD and book he purchases, checking it off his list with a pink highlighter when it arrives. The most significant change: Elton John no longer wants to die at the piano.

"Years ago, I didn't have anything," Elton tells me quietly. "I wanted to die on the stage. That's all I had. Now I don't. I've got children. I want to come off the road. I want to be there, I want to take them to baseball, I want to take them to soccer games. My life is completely changed."

Well, not completely. By the time you read this, Elton John will be gearing up to get back on the road, playing everywhere from Michigan to Tel Aviv.

Some old habits are hard to break.

ELTON JOHN'S BEVERLY Hills home is one of several of his domiciles, including an Atlanta penthouse and a sprawling estate in the English countryside. It is well-appointed in the slightly less ostentatious style that Elton has adopted since getting sober 25 years ago. The

walls are covered in Keith Haring originals and pictures taken by the Southern photographer William Eggleston. Elton hobbles in gingerly – he's had surgery in the past on both knees, the result of too much tennis, and too much jumping on and off pianos.

For someone whose singles aren't on the charts anymore, Elton still attracts the attention of a pop star in his prime. There have been scraps aplenty, beginning a decade ago by ripping on Madonna for lip-synching in concert. "I say what I feel," says Elton. "I probably went too far with Madonna, and I got very personal and I wrote her – she was very gracious." Still, it's an issue for a singer whose tenor has become growly but relies on no artificial enhancement. "You know, fucking music magazines writing a review of Janet Jackson saying, 'This is the greatest show – four and a half stars.' It's fucking lip-synched! Hello! That's not a show! I'd rather go and see a drag queen. Fuck off."

He doesn't apologize for calling out his frequent touring partner Billy Joel for his drinking: "He's one of the great American songwriters. But I know when people used to say to me, 'You're wasting your life,' I'd go, 'Fuck off!' and I wouldn't speak to them for two years. Billy was pissed, and I understand. But does it mean I don't love him? No, of course not."

Elton says it all with a laugh and a serene smile. This doesn't quite take the edge off. He attributes his tendency toward the outrageous to his British heritage. "There's something about British men that can't wait to get into drag," says Elton. "I'm very fortunate to have grown up in Britain, which has a very lethal and wicked black sense of humor."

Elton has long been a target of the British tabloid press, and he sued the *Sun* after a series of allegations, from the serious (that he once hired rent boys for a party) to the absurd (that he had his dogs debarked). The *Sun* printed a retraction and reportedly paid him £1 million. But now he looks on the tabloids with something bordering on kindness and respect. "In a way, I'm grateful to them," he says. "Americans sort of think of their stars as royalty and give them an easy ride. Elvis Presley would never have happened in England because he wouldn't have been able to hide away. Michael Jackson, Anna Nicole Smith – the British are so 'Oh, get a fucking grip.' They're so hard on you. If Brian Wilson had lived in England, he wouldn't have had a [disgraced guru] Dr. Eugene Landy to deal with."

Of course, Elton says this while literally wearing rose-colored glasses with 20/20 hindsight. His early days were volatile and awash with cocaine, booze and parties where he dressed like Marie Antoinette.

Return of the Honky Cat

(1) Longtime guitarist Davey Johnstone, Elton and producer T Bone Burnett at a *Wonderful Crazy Night* session last February in L.A.

(2) With mother Sheila Farebrother in 1979 during a tour stop in Moscow. (3) With children Zachary (left) and Elijah, ages five and three, and Furnish on vacation in St. Tropez, France, last August. "God, that was the best decision," he says of having kids.



Perhaps not coincidentally, Elton has long been a friend of outcasts – appearing onstage with Axl Rose and Eminem at their public low points. He has also crossed lines others wouldn't dare, including playing at Rush Limbaugh's wedding.

"I went onstage and I said, 'I bet you're all wondering what the fuck I'm doing here,'" says Elton. "And they just broke – it was one of the best audiences I've played. I'm playing and I say, 'Listen, I'm not so bad after all. I'm queer, I'm gay and you love me.' OK? Point taken. Thank you very much."

Creatively, he doesn't wish he had done anything different, not even 1979's *Victim of Love*, his attempt to surf the disco craze. "It was a good idea, except that disco had finished by then," he says. "It was just too late. I don't regret anything." He pauses and laughs. "Well, I regret taking the drugs for as long as I did."

But Elton does rue some steps he didn't take during the onset of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s. "I should've been there at the ACT UP marches," he says, his voice a mixture of guilt and fact. "I should've been there and I wasn't. I know I did the fucking record with Dionne Warwick and Stevie Wonder and Gladys Knight. I wasn't omnipresent, and I've felt a lot of guilt about that." He rubs his hands over his face. "I've tried to make up for lost time."

Elton has raised hundreds of millions of dollars for AIDS research, and one of his recent efforts on the gay-rights front was indicative of Elton's camp effectiveness. Elton has long spoken against Russia's prehistoric, brutal legislation against homosexuality. So when he got a call from President Vladimir Putin, he wasn't shocked; they talked for a few minutes. Alas, it wasn't Putin: Elton had been pranked by two Russian radio DJs and was lampooned in the media. He can laugh about it now: "I was just happy I answered their questions so intelligently."

But there was a serious endpoint: The real Vladimir Putin called Elton a few days later to apologize. Putin told Elton to call him the next time he was in Moscow and they could talk gay rights in Russia.

"He spoke to me in English – he was very apologetic," remembers Elton, folding his arms across his chest in a satisfied manner. "He said, 'I would love to meet you. Let's sit down and talk,' and I said, 'I'm very, very flattered that you called me.'" Elton grinned again. "Come on – hello!"

Except for a break in the late 1980s, Taupin has been around [Cont. on 58]

Elton freely admits to all the boorish behavior and takes the blame, but his childhood provides some insight into the root causes. It was 1950s England, and men, coming off fighting the

Germans, were stoic and aloof. Elton's father, an RAF officer, wasn't any different. "They wouldn't hold you, they wouldn't say they loved you," says Elton. "I was afraid of my father. I was walking on eggshells the whole time trying to get his approval. He's been dead for a long time, and I'm still trying to prove things to him."

I ask him what he means.

"I still do things and say, 'Dad, you would've loved this.'"

His father died in 1997 without ever seeing Elton play live. His father physically touched him most when he was beating him. "My mum always says, 'That's just the way we did it in those days, and it didn't affect you,'" Elton says. "And I'd say, 'What are you talking about? It affects me every day.'"

Bernie Taupin, his writing partner of nearly half a century, had a box seat for many of Elton's shenanigans.

"A lot of those awful tantrums happened when he was heavily into drugs or alcohol or whatever," says Taupin, who now spends most of his time painting outside Santa Barbara. "So, obviously, those vices sort of gave birth to that." In the bad old days, his solution was to walk away: "There are times when I've just thrown my arms up, left the tour and said, 'I don't want to be around this. I'm not going to be around this.' Ultimately, I think he feels incredibly embarrassed. He will never apologize, but I think there was a part of him that was very ashamed that I'd been so disgusted with it. I think a lot of the times that snapped him out of it."

The Rise of Intelligent Machines

PART 1

Revolutionary algorithms now let robots mimic the human brain. They can diagnose disease, drive cars and fly planes. But as computers leap forward, are we on the verge of creating a new life-form - or something much darker?

BY JEFF GOODELL

PHOTOGRAPH BY PHILIP TOLEDANO

W

ELCOME TO ROBOT NURSERY SCHOOL," PIETER ABBEEL SAYS as he opens the door to the Robot Learning Lab on the seventh floor of a sleek new building on the northern edge of the UC-Berkeley campus. The lab is chaotic: bikes leaning against the wall, a dozen or so grad students in disorganized cubicles, whiteboards covered with indecipherable equations. Abbeel, 38, is a thin, wiry guy, dressed in jeans and a stretched-out T-shirt. He moved to the U.S. from Belgium in 2000 to get a Ph.D. in computer science at Stanford and is now one of the world's foremost experts in understanding the challenge of teaching robots to think

intelligently. But first, he has to teach them to "think" at all. "That's why we call this nursery school," he jokes. He introduces me to Brett, a six-foot-tall humanoid robot made by Willow Garage, a high-profile Silicon Valley robotics manufacturer that is now out of business. The lab acquired the robot several years ago to experiment with. Brett, which stands for "Berkeley robot for the elimination of tedious tasks," is a friendly-looking creature with a big, flat head and widely spaced cameras for eyes, a chunky torso, two arms with grippers for hands and wheels for feet. At the moment, Brett is off-duty and stands in the center of the lab with the mysterious, quiet grace of an unplugged robot. On the floor nearby is a box of toys that Abbeel and the students teach Brett to play with: a wooden hammer, a plastic toy airplane, some giant Lego blocks. Brett is only one of many robots



in the lab. In another cubicle, a nameless 18-inch-tall robot hangs from a sling on the back of a chair. Down in the basement is an industrial robot that plays in the equivalent of a robot sandbox for hours every day, just to see what it can teach itself. Across the street in another Berkeley lab, a surgical robot is learning how to stitch up human flesh, while a graduate student teaches drones to pilot themselves intelligently around objects. "We don't want to have drones crashing into things and falling out of the sky," Abbeel says. "We're trying to teach them to see."

Industrial robots have long been programmed with specific tasks: Move arm six inches to the left, grab module, twist to the right, insert module into PC board. Repeat 300 times each hour. These machines are as dumb as lawn mowers. But in recent years, breakthroughs in machine learning – algorithms that roughly mimic the human brain and allow machines to learn things for themselves – have given computers a remarkable ability to recognize speech and identify visual patterns. Abbeel's goal is to imbue robots with a kind of general intelligence – a way of understanding the world so they can learn to complete tasks on their own. He has a long way to go. "Robots don't even have the learning capabilities of a two-year-old," he says. For example, Brett has learned to do simple tasks, such as tying a knot or folding laundry. Things that are simple for humans, such as recognizing that a crumpled ball of fabric on a table is in fact a towel, are surprisingly difficult for a robot, in part because a robot has no common sense, no memory of earlier attempts at towel-folding and, most important, no concept of what a towel is. All it sees is a wad of color.

In order to get around this problem, Abbeel created a self-teaching method inspired by child-psychology tapes of kids constantly adjusting their approaches when solving tasks. Now, when Brett sorts through laundry, it does a similar thing: grabbing the wadded-up towel with its gripper hands, trying to get a sense of its

shape, how to fold it. It sounds primitive, and it is. But then you think about it again: *A robot is learning to fold a towel.*

All this is spooky, Frankenstein-land stuff. The complexity of tasks that smart machines can perform is increasing at an exponential rate. Where will this ultimately take us? If a robot can learn to fold a towel on its own, will it someday be able to cook you dinner, perform surgery, even conduct a war? Artificial intelligence may well help solve the most complex problems humankind faces, like curing cancer and climate change –

but in the near term, it is also likely to empower surveillance, erode privacy and turbocharge telemarketers. Beyond that, larger questions loom: Will machines someday be able to think for themselves, reason through problems, display emotions? No one knows. The rise of smart machines is unlike any other technological revolution because what is ultimately at stake here is the very idea of humanness – we may be on the verge of creating a new life form, one that could mark not only an evolutionary breakthrough, but a potential threat to our survival as a species.

However it plays out, the revolution has begun. Last summer, the Berkeley team installed a short-term-memory system into a simulated robot. Sergey Levine, a computer scientist who worked on the project, says they noticed "this odd thing." To test the memory program in the robot, they gave it a com-

mand to put a peg into one of two openings, left or right. For control, they tried the experiment again with no memory program – and to their surprise, the robot was still able to put the peg in the correct hole. Without memory, how did it remember where to put the peg? "Eventually, we realized that, as soon as the robot received the command, it twisted the arms toward the correct opening," Levine says. Then, after the command disappeared, it could look at how its body was positioned to see which opening the peg should go to. In effect, the robot had figured out a way on its own to correctly execute the command. "It was very surprising," says Levine. "And kinda unsettling."

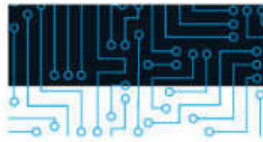
Abbeel leads me to his office, a windowless cubicle where he talks about a recent breakthrough made by DeepMind, an AI

start-up that was purchased by Google for an estimated \$400 million in 2014. A few years ago, DeepMind stunned people by teaching a computer to play Atari video games like Space Invaders far better than any human. But the amazing thing was it did so without programming the computer to understand the rules of the game. This was not like Deep Blue beating a human at chess, in which the rules of the game were programmed into it. All the computer knew was that its goal was to get a high score. Using a method called reinforcement learning, which is the equivalent of saying "good dog" whenever it did something right, the computer messed around with the game, learning the rules on its own. Within a few hours, it was able to play with superhuman skill. This was a major breakthrough in AI – the first time a computer had "learned" a complex skill by itself.

Intrigued, researchers in Abbeel's lab decided to try an experiment with a similar reinforcement-learning algorithm they had written to help robots learn to swim, hop and walk. How would it do playing video games? To their surprise, the algorithm, known as Trust Region Policy Optimization, or TRPO, achieved results almost as good as the DeepMind algorithm. In other words, the TRPO exhibited an ability to learn in a generalized way. "We discovered that TRPO can beat humans in video games," Abbeel says. "Not just teach a robot to walk."

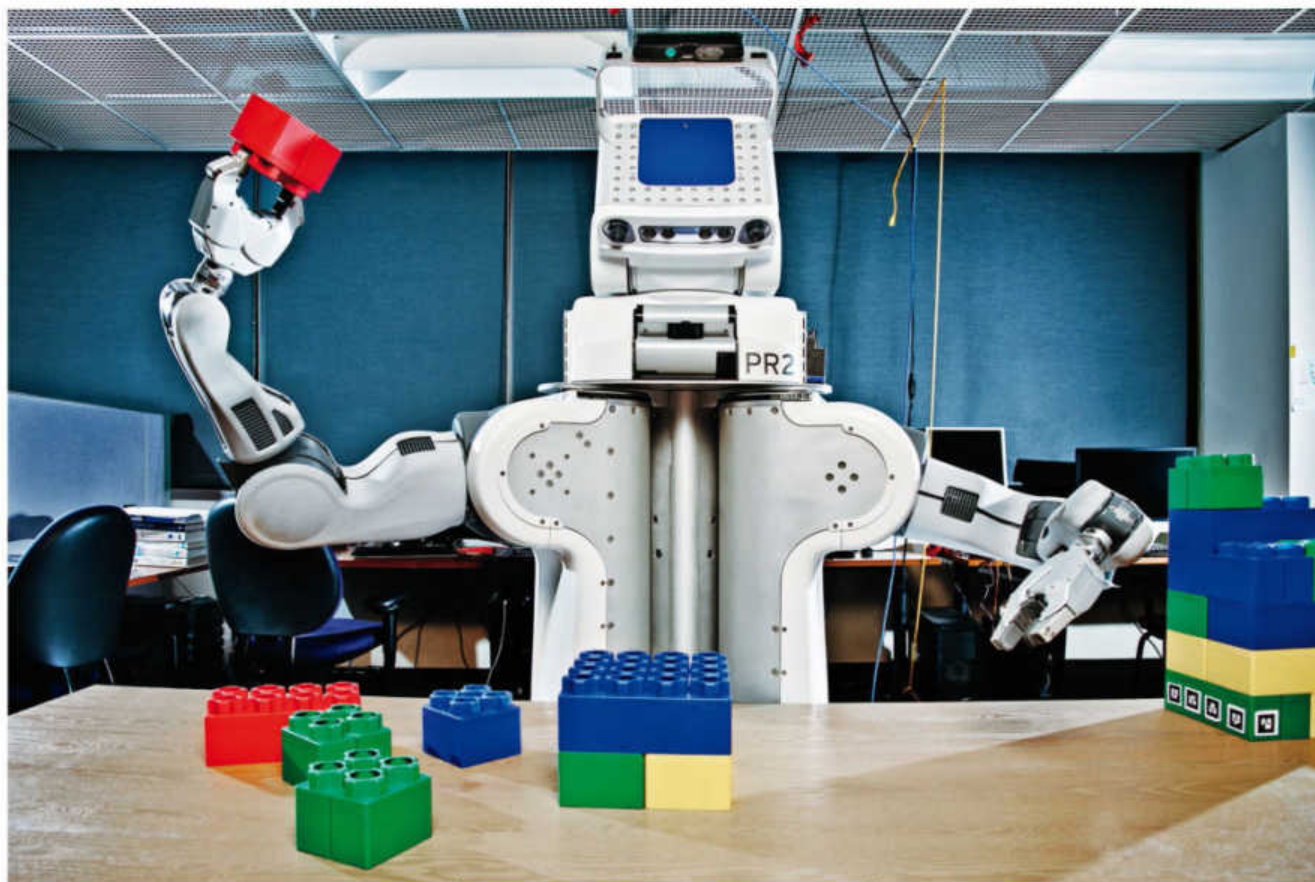
Abbeel pulls up a video. It's a robot simulator. In the opening frames, you see a robot collapsed on a black-and-white checkered floor. "Now remember, this is the same algorithm as the video games," he says. The robot has been given three goals: Go as far as possible, don't stomp your feet very hard and keep your torso above a certain height. "It doesn't know what walking is," Abbeel says. "It doesn't know it has legs or arms – nothing like that. It just has a goal. It has to figure out how to achieve it."

Abbeel pushes a button, and the simulation begins. The robot flops on the floor, no idea what it's doing. "In principle, it could have decided to walk or jump or skip," Abbeel says. But the algorithm "learns" in real time that if it puts its legs beneath it, it can propel itself forward. It allows the robot to analyze its previous performance, decipher which actions led to better performance, and change its future behavior accordingly. Soon it's doddering around, swaying like a drunk. It plunges forward, falls, picks itself up, takes a few steps, falls again. But gradually it rises, and begins to stumble-run toward the goal. You can almost see it gaining confidence, its legs moving beneath it, now picking up speed like a running back. The robot doesn't know it's running. It was not programmed to run. But nevertheless, it is running. It has figured out by itself all the complex balance and limb control and



"The rise of smart machines raises serious questions we need to consider about who we are as humans," Elon Musk says, "and what kind of future we are building for ourselves."

Contributing editor JEFF GOODELL is a 2016 New America Fellow and covered the Paris climate agreement in January.



physics. It is beyond surprising; it is magical. It's like watching a fish evolve into a human being in 40 seconds.

"The way the robot moves and begins to walk – it almost looks alive," I say.

Abbeel smiles. "Almost."

DESPITE HOW IT'S POR-
trayed in books and movies,
artificial intelligence is not a
synthetic brain floating in a
case of blue liquid somewhere.
It is an algorithm – a mathe-
matical equation that tells a
computer what functions to perform (think
of it as a cooking recipe for machines). Al-
gorithms are to the 21st century what coal
was to the 19th century: the engine of our
economy and the fuel of our modern lives.
Without algorithms, your phone wouldn't
work. There would be no Facebook, no
Google, no Amazon. Algorithms schedule
flights and then fly the airplanes, and help
doctors diagnose diseases. "If every algo-
rithm suddenly stopped working, it would
be the end of the world as we know it,"
writes Pedro Domingos in *The Master Al-
gorithm*, a popular account of machine
learning. In the world of AI, the Holy Grail
is to discover the single algorithm that will
allow machines to understand the world –
the digital equivalent of the Standard
Model that lets physicists explain the oper-
ations of the universe.

Learning to Be Human

Brett (Berkeley robot for the
elimination of tedious tasks) is a
humanoid robot that has taught itself
how to build and sort objects.

Mathematical algorithms have been
around for thousands of years and are the
basis for modern computing. Data goes in,
the computer does its thing, and the algo-
rithm spits out a result. What's new is that
scientists have developed algorithms that
reverse this process, allowing computers to
write their *own* algorithms. Say you want
to fly a helicopter upside down: You write
an algorithm that gives the computer infor-
mation about the helicopter's controls (the
input data), then you tell it how you want
to fly the helicopter, and at what angle (the
result), and then, bingo, the computer will
spit out its own algorithm that tells the he-
licopter how to do it. This process, called
machine learning, is the idea behind AI: If
a machine can teach itself how to fly a he-
licopter upside down, it may be able to teach
itself other things too, like how to find love
on Tinder, or recognize your voice when
you speak into your iPhone, or, at the outer
reaches, design a Terminator-spewing Sky-

net. "Artificial intelligence is the science of
making machines smart," Demis Hassabis,
co-founder of DeepMind, has said.

We are, of course, surrounded by smart
machines already. When you use Google
Maps, algorithms plot the quickest route
and calculate traffic delays based on real-
time data and predictive analysis of traffic.
When you talk to Google Voice, the ability
to recognize your speech is based on a kind
of machine learning called neural networks
that allows computers to transform your
words into bits of sound, compare those
sounds to others, and then understand your
questions. Facebook keeps unwanted con-
tent off the site by scanning billions of pic-
tures with image-recognition programs
that spot beheading videos and dick pics.

Where is the acceleration of smart ma-
chines heading? It took life on Earth 3 bil-
lion years to emerge from the ooze and
achieve higher intelligence. By contrast,
it took the computer roughly 60 years to
evolve from a hunk of silicon into a machine
capable of driving a car across the country
or identifying a face in the crowd. With
each passing week, new breakthroughs
are announced: In January, DeepMind
revealed it has developed an algorithm that
beat the European champion of Go, an an-
cient Chinese board game that is far more
complex than chess (the algorithm, named
AlphaGo, will take on the world champi-
on in mid-March). Of course, humans had

Photograph by SPENCER LOWELL

a hand in this rapid evolution, but it's hard not to think we have reached some kind of inflection point in the evolution of smart machines. Are we on the verge of witnessing the birth of a new species? How long until machines become smarter than us?

Ray Kurzweil, Google's resident futurist, has popularized the idea of "the singularity," which is roughly defined as the moment that silicon-based machines become more intelligent than carbon-based machines (humans) and the evolutionary balance shifts toward the former. "In the coming years, we'll be doing a lot of our thinking in the cloud," he said at a technology conference a few years ago. He has even predicted an exact date for this singularity: 2045. In an offhand comment at a recent conference, Elon Musk, founder of Tesla and SpaceX, called the development of AI "summoning the demon." Although he later told me his remarks were an overstatement, he says, "The rise of smart machines brings up serious questions that we need to consider about who we are as humans and what kind of future we are building for ourselves." As he points out, our dependence on machines is here now: "We are already cyborgs. Just try turning off your phone for a while – you will understand phantom-limb syndrome."

It's not like superintelligent machines have to be supervil to pose a threat. "The real risk with AI isn't malice but competence," physicist Stephen Hawking argued recently. "A superintelligent AI will be extremely good at accomplishing its goals, and if those goals aren't aligned with ours, we're in trouble. You're probably not an evil ant-hater who steps on ants out of malice, but if you're in charge of a hydroelectric green-energy project and there's an anthill in the region to be flooded, too bad for the ants. Let's not place humanity in the position of those ants."

Despite advances like smarter algorithms and more capable robots, the future of superintelligent machines is still more sci-fi than science. Right now, says Yann LeCun, the director of Facebook AI Research, "AIs are nowhere near as smart as a rat." Yes, with years of programming and millions of dollars, IBM built Watson, the machine that beat the smartest humans at *Jeopardy!* in 2011 and is now the basis for

the company's "cognitive computing" initiative. It can read 800 million pages a second and can digest the entire corpus of Wikipedia, not to mention decades of law and medical journals. Yet it cannot teach you how to ride a bike because its intelligence is narrow – it knows nothing about how the world actually works. One of the most sophisticated AI programs, named Aristo, at the Allen Institute for Artificial Intelligence in Seattle, cannot understand a sentence like "People breathe air." To comprehend this, you need a general knowledge of the world – which it does not have. Even if it could define the words, the program does not know if breathing air is what people do in order to live; or if people breathe air once a minute, or once in their lives. Impressive feats, such as Skype Translator (still in preview), which allows users to have real-time conversations in two different languages, also have a long way to go. In one conversation with a person in Italy, my comments about the weather were translated into comments about the Bible.

This is not to say that the risk of a rise of smart machines isn't real, or that one day, a Skynet won't emerge from some collection of data points we can hardly imagine. Autonomous weapons, such as killer drones that can assassinate people on their own based on facial-recognition technology and other data, are indeed a real danger. But they are not a threat to the survival of the human species. Nor is it likely that some hacker in

North Korea is going to suddenly create a new algorithm that gives Kim Jong-un the ability to launch an attack of Terminators on the world. In this context, AI is not like an iPhone, where you write a new app and you're done. It's more like building the Internet itself – something that can only be done over time, and with a huge number of incremental advances. As Andrew Ng, the U.S.-based chief scientist at Baidu, which is China's Google, told me recently, "Worrying about killer robots is like worrying about overpopulation on Mars – we'll have plenty of time to figure it out."

In fact, the problem with the hyperbole about killer robots is that it masks the real risks that we face from the rise of smart machines – job losses due to workers being replaced by robots, the escalation of autonomous weapons in warfare, and the simple

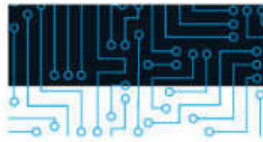
fact that the more we depend on machines, the more we are at risk when something goes wrong, whether it's from a technical glitch or a Chinese hacker. It's about the alienation that will come when we live in a world where we talk to machines more than humans, and when art becomes just a harmonious algorithmic output. The age of AI will also bring profound privacy challenges, not just from smart drones watching you from above, but also from corporations that track your every move in order to sell you stuff. As Marcelo Rinesi, the chief technology officer at the Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies, has put it, "The future isn't a robot boot stamping on a human face forever. It's a world where everything you see has a little telemarketer inside them, one that knows everything about you and never, ever stops selling things to you."

It also masks the benefits that could come from a deeper alliance with machines. Most researchers, like DeepMind's Demis Hassabis, believe that if we give machines intelligence, they may be able to help us solve big problems like disease and health care, as well as help scientists tackle big questions in climate change and physics. Microsoft's Eric Horvitz sees the quest for AI in even grander terms: "The big question for humanity is, is our experience computational? And if so, what will a better understanding of how our minds work tell us about ourselves as beings on the planet? And what might we do with the self-knowledge we gain about this?"

TECHNOLOGICAL REVOLUTIONS inspire fear – sometimes justifiably and sometimes not. During the Industrial Revolution, British textile workers smashed machines they worried would take their jobs (they did). When the age of electricity began, people believed wires might cause insanity (they didn't). And in the 1950s, appliance manufacturers thought there would soon be nuclear vacuums.

AI has long been plagued by claims that run far ahead of the actual science. In 1958, when the "perceptron," the first so-called neural-network system, was introduced, a newspaper suggested it might soon lead to "thinking machines" that could reproduce and achieve consciousness. In the 1960s, when John McCarthy, the scientist who coined the term "artificial intelligence," proposed a new research project to Pentagon officials, he claimed that building an AI system would take about a decade. When that did not happen, the field went through periods of decline in the 1970s and 1980s known to scientists as the "AI winters."

But those winters are now over. For one thing, the continued increases in computer power along with drops in prices have



Algorithms that enable AI are to the 21st century what coal was to the 19th – they are the engine of our economy: "If they stop working, it will be the end of the world."



provided the horsepower that sophisticated AI algorithms need to function. A new kind of chip, called the graphics processing unit – which was originally created for video-game processing – has been particularly important for running neural networks that can have hundreds of millions of connections between their nodes.

The second big change is the arrival of big data. Intelligence in machines, like intelligence in humans, must be taught. A human brain, which is genetically primed to categorize things, still needs to see real-life examples before it can distinguish between cats and dogs. That's even more true for machine learning. DeepMind's breakthrough with Go and Atari games required the computer to play thousands of games before it achieved expertise. Part of the AI breakthrough lies in the avalanche of data about our world, which provides the schooling that AIs need. Massive databases, terabytes of storage, decades of search results and the entire digital universe became the teachers now making AI smart.

In the past, the attempt to create a thinking machine was largely an exercise carried out by philosophers and computer scientists in academia. "What's different today is the stuff actually works," says Facebook's LeCun. "Facebook, IBM, Microsoft – everybody is deploying it. And there's money in it." Today, whatever company has the best learning algorithms and

Playing God From 9 to 5

Researchers at the Berkeley Robot Learning Lab work to create machines that can learn on their own and may one day achieve human intelligence.

data wins. Why is Google such a successful ad platform? Better algorithms that can predict ads you will click on. Even a 0.5 percent difference in click-through rates can mean enormous amounts of money to a company with \$50 billion in revenues. Image recognition, which depends on machine learning, is one place where the competition is now fierce between Apple, Microsoft, Google and cloud services like Dropbox. Another battleground is perfecting speech recognition. The company that can figure that out first – making talking to a machine as natural as talking to a person – will have a huge advantage. "Voice interface is going to be as important and transformative as touch," says Baidu's Ng. Google and Apple are buying up AI startups that are promising to offer smarter assistants, and AI is crucial to the success of self-driving cars, which will have a tremendous impact on the auto industry and potentially change the look and feel of cities,

Photograph by SPENCER LOWELL

once we will no longer need to devote space to parking private vehicles. "AI is the new buzzword," says Jason Calacanis, an entrepreneur in San Francisco. "You just use the phrase 'artificial intelligence' in your business plan and everyone pays attention. It's the flavor of the month."

That kind of skepticism is justified. AI can spot a cat in a photo and parse words when you talk. But perception is not reasoning. Seeing is not thinking. And mastering Go is not like living in the real world. Before AI can be considered intelligent, much less dangerous, it must be taught to reason. Or, at least, to have some common sense. And researchers still have a long way to go in achieving anything that resembles human intelligence or consciousness.

"We went through one wall, we know how to do vision now, and that works," says LeCun. "And the good news is we have ideas about how to get to the next step, which hopefully will work. But it's like we're driving 50 mph on the highway in the fog and there is a brick wall somewhere that we've not seen. Right now we are just happy driving until we run out of fuel."

MIT PHYSICIST MAX TEGMARK, 48, HAS a bowl haircut and a boyish eagerness that make him seem younger than he is. In his two-story suburban house near Boston, the living room is sparsely furnished, with pictures of ducks and woodchucks on the

wall. As a physicist and cosmologist, Tegmark has a wacky side. He's best known for exploring the idea of parallel universes, suggesting that there may be a vast number of universes, not all of which obey our laws of physics. It's an idea he acknowledges is on the fringes of accepted science. But Tegmark (on his website, he rates the biggest goofs in his life on a zero-to-20 point scale), embraces it with giddy enthusiasm. In recent years, he has also become one of the most outspoken voices about the dangers of runaway AI.

This past summer, we sat in his dining room to discuss the risks of AI and his work with the Future of Life Institute, which he co-founded and is described as a "volunteer-run research and outreach organization working to mitigate existential risks facing humanity." Although the institute includes luminaries like Hawking on its advisory panel, it's mostly just an ad-hoc group of Tegmark's friends and colleagues who meet every few months in his living room. The institute, financed by the Open Philanthropy Project and a \$10 million gift from Musk, funds studies into how to best develop AI and educates people about the risks of advanced technology. A few days after our dinner, the institute published an open letter, which was picked up by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, warning about the dangers of autonomous weapons. "If any major military power pushes ahead with AI weapon development, a global arms race is virtually inevitable," the letter read. "Autonomous weapons will become the Kalashnikovs of tomorrow." The letter has been signed by more than 20,000 people, including scientists and entrepreneurs like Hawking, Musk, Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak and Nobel laureate Frank Wilczek.

In January 2015, Tegmark organized the first major conference on the risks of AI. (It's worth noting that Tegmark is a physicist, not a computer scientist. In fact, it's mostly entrepreneurs, philosophers, sci-fi writers and scientists in fields outside of AI research who are sounding the alarm.) The three-day event in Puerto Rico brought together many of the top researchers and scientists in the field, as well as entrepreneurs like Musk. It was modeled after the Asilo-

mar Conference on Recombinant DNA in 1975, which is remembered as a landmark discussion in the dangers of synthetic biology and cloning. According to several attendees, one of the central ideas discussed at the 2015 conference was how long it would take before machine intelligence met or surpassed human intelligence. On one side of the argument, AI pioneers like Ng claimed it would be hundreds of years before AI surpassed human intelligence; others, like Musk and Stuart Russell, a professor of computer science at UC-Berkeley, said it could be much sooner. "The median in Puerto Rico was 40 years," Tegmark says.

Like Hawking, Tegmark doesn't believe superintelligent machines need to be evil to be dangerous. "We want to make machines that not only have goals but goals that are aligned with ours," he says. "If you have a self-driving car with speech recognition and you say, 'Take me to the airport as fast as possible,' you're going to get to the airport, but you're going to get there chased by helicopters and covered in vomit. You'll say, 'That's not what I wanted.' And the car will reply, 'That's what you told me to do.'"

Tegmark believes it's important to think about this now, in part because it's not clear how fast AI will progress. It could be 100 years before they gain anything like human intelligence. Or it could be 10. He uses the nuclear analogy. "Think about what happened with the nuclear bomb," he says. "When scientists started

working on it, if they would have thought ahead about what it was going to mean for the world and took precautions against it, wouldn't the world be a better place now? Or would it have made a difference?"

WHEREVER YOU GO, assume a camera is pointing at you. They are on street corners, in drones and in most of the 4 billion or so cell phones on the planet.

In 2012, the FBI launched the \$1 billion Next Generation Identification system, which uses algorithms to collect facial images, fingerprints, iris scans and other biometric data on millions of Americans and makes them accessible to 18,000 law-enforcement agencies.

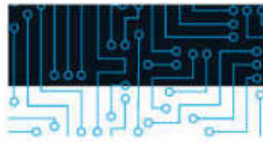
None of this would be possible – or at least not as effective – without the work of Yann LeCun. In the world of AI, LeCun is the closest thing there is to a rock star, having been one of a trio of early AI researchers who developed the algorithms that made image recognition possible. LeCun has never worked for law enforcement and is committed to civil rights, but that doesn't matter – technology, once it is invented, finds its own way in the world.

These days, you can find LeCun at the Facebook office in downtown Manhattan. In an open space the size of a basketball court, rows of people stare at monitors beneath fractals on the walls. LeCun's AI lab is off in a corner of the room, its 20 or so researchers indistinguishable from the rest of the Facebook worker bees. (His lab employs another 25 AI researchers between offices in Silicon Valley and Paris.) LeCun sits at a long row of desks, shoulder-to-shoulder with his team. If he looks out the window, he can almost see the building where IBM's Watson is housed.

Wearing jeans and a polo shirt, LeCun shows me around with a calm, professorial air. He grew up outside Paris, but only a trace of an accent remains. "I am everything the religious right despises: a scientist, an atheist, a leftist (by American standards, at least), a university professor and a Frenchman," he boasts on his website. He has three kids and flies model airplanes on the weekends.

LeCun was a pioneer in deep learning, a kind of machine learning that revolutionized AI. While he was working on his undergraduate degree in 1980, he read about the 1958 "perceptron" and the promise of neural-network algorithms that allow machines to "perceive" things such as images or words. The networks, which mimic the structure of the neural pathways in our brains, are algorithms that use a network of neurons, or "nodes," to perform a weighted statistical analysis of inputs (which can be anything – numbers, sounds, images). Seeing the networks' potential, LeCun wrote his Ph.D. thesis on an approach to training neural networks to automatically "tune" themselves to recognize patterns more accurately – ultimately creating the algorithms that now allow ATMs to read checks. In the years since, refinements in neural networks by other programmers have been the technological underpinning in virtually every advance in smart machines, from computer vision in self-driving cars to speech recognition in Google Voice. It's as if LeCun largely invented the nervous system for artificial life.

Despite the name, LeCun says that neural networks are not an attempt to mimic the brain. "It's not the latest, greatest, most recent discoveries about neuroscience," he says. "It's very classic stuff. If you are building airplanes, you get inspired by birds be-



"If any military power pushes forward with AI weapon development, a global arms race is inevitable – autonomous weapons will become the Kalashnikovs of tomorrow."

cause birds can fly. Even if you don't know much about birds, you can realize they have wings and they propel themselves into air. But building an airplane is very different from building a bird. You have to derive generic principles – but you cannot derive generic principles by studying the details of how biology works.”

In LeCun's view, this is the flaw in much brain research being done, including Europe's touted Human Brain Project, a 10-year, \$1.3 billion initiative to unravel the mysteries of the mind by essentially simulating the brain's 86 billion neurons and 100 trillion synapses on a supercomputer. “The idea is that if you study every detail of how neurons and synapses function and somehow simulate this on big enough networks, somehow AI will emerge,” he says. “I think that's completely crazy.”

After a stint at Bell Labs in New Jersey, LeCun spent a decade as a professor at New York University. In 2013, Mark Zuckerberg lured him to Facebook, in part by letting him keep his post part-time at NYU. “Mark said to me, ‘Facebook is 10 years old – we have to think about the next 20 years: What is communication between people and the digital world going to look like?’” LeCun recalls. “He was convinced that AI would play a very big role in this, and that it will be very important to have ways to mediate interactions between people and the digital world using intelligent systems. And when someone tells you, ‘Create a research organization from scratch,’ it's hard to resist.”

LeCun won't say how much money Facebook has invested in AI, but it's recognized as one of the most ambitious labs in Silicon Valley. “Most of our AI research is focused on understanding the meaning of what people share,” Zuckerberg wrote during a Q&A on his website. “For example, if you take a photo that has a friend in it, then we should make sure that friend sees it. If you take a photo of a dog or write a post about politics, we should understand that so we can show that post and help you connect to people who like dogs and politics. In order to do this really well, our goal is to build AI systems that are better than humans at our primary senses: vision, listening, etc.” In January, Zuckerberg announced that his personal challenge for 2016 is to write a simple AI to run his home and help him with his work. “You can think of it kind of like Jarvis in *Iron Man*,” he wrote.

LeCun says that one of the best examples of AI at Facebook is Moments, a new app that identifies friends through facial recognition and allows you to send them

pictures. But less-advanced AI is deployed everywhere at the company, from scanning images to tracking viewing patterns to determining which of your friends' statuses to show you first when you log in. It's also used to manage the insane amount of data Facebook deals with. Users upload 2 billion photos and watch 8 billion videos every day. The company uses a technique called AI Encoding to break the files down by scene and make their sizes less “fat.” The gains are not monumental, but they result in big savings in storage and efficiency.

Despite all the progress, LeCun knows these are only baby steps toward general intelligence. Even image recognition, which has seen dramatic advances, still has problems: AI programs are confused by shadows, reflections and variations in pixelation. But the biggest barrier is what's called

we build a machine that can watch a movie and then tell us what the next frame is going to be, let alone what's going to happen half an hour from now, where are the objects going to go, the fact that there are objects, the fact that the world is three-dimensional – everything that we learn about the world's physical constraints?”

One solution that LeCun is working on is to represent everything on Facebook as a vector, which allows computers to plot a data point in space. “The typical vectors we use to represent concepts like images have about 4,000 dimensions,” he says. “So, basically, it is a list of 4,000 numbers that characterizes everything about an image.” Vectors can describe an image, a piece of text or human interests. Reduced to a number, it's easy for computers to search and compare. If the interests of a person, represented by a vector, match the vector of an image, the person will likely enjoy the image. “Basically, it reduces reasoning to geometry,” he says.

As for the dangers of AI, LeCun calls them “very distant.” He believes the notion that intelligent machines will evolve with the trappings of human intelligence and emotion is a fallacy: “A lot of the bad things that come out of human behavior come from those very basic drives of wanting to survive and wanting to reproduce and wanting

to avoid pain. There is no reason to believe robots will have that self-preservation instinct unless we build it into them. But they may have empathy because we will build it into them so they can interact with humans in a proper way. So the question is, what kind of low-level drives and behaviors do we build into machines so they become an extension of our intelligence and power, and not a replacement for it?”

On my way out of Facebook, I'm struck by how densely packed everyone is in the office – this is an empire of human beings and machines working together. It's hard to imagine the future will be any different, no matter how sophisticated our robots become. “Algorithms are designed and built by humans, and they reflect the biases of their makers,” says Jaron Lanier, a prominent computer scientist and author. For better or worse, whatever future we create, it will be the one we design and build for ourselves. To paraphrase an old adage about the structure of the universe: It's humans all the way down. **2**

Part Two will explore how artificial intelligence will impact the world of self-driving cars and the future of warfare.



Fight for AI's Future Facebook's Yann LeCun (left) pioneers AI; Tesla founder Elon Musk warns of its dangers.

“unsupervised learning.” Right now, machines mainly learn by supervised learning, where the system is shown thousands of pictures of, say, a cat, until it understands the attributes of cats. The other, less common method is reinforcement learning, where the computer is given information to identify, makes a decision and is then told whether it's correct or not. Unsupervised learning uses no feedback or input, relying on what you could call artificial intuition. “It's the way humans learn,” LeCun says. We observe, draw inferences and add them to our bank of knowledge. “That's the big nut we have to crack,” he says.

An idea floating around is that unsupervised learning should be about prediction. “If I show you a short movie and then ask what's going to happen in the next second, you should probably be able to guess the answer,” LeCun says. An object in the air will fall – you don't need to know much about the world to predict this. “But if it's a complicated murder mystery and I ask you who is the killer and then to describe what is going to happen at the end of the movie, you will need a lot of abstract knowledge about what is going on,” he says. “Prediction is the essence of intelligence. How do



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Reviews

"See, I invented Kanye.
It wasn't any Kanyes.
Now I look and look around and
There's so many Kanyes!"
—KANYE WEST, "I Love Kanye"

Kanye's Latest Dark Twisted Triumph

Rap's most conflicted superstar has the fight of his life – with his own conscience



Kanye West

The Life of Pablo

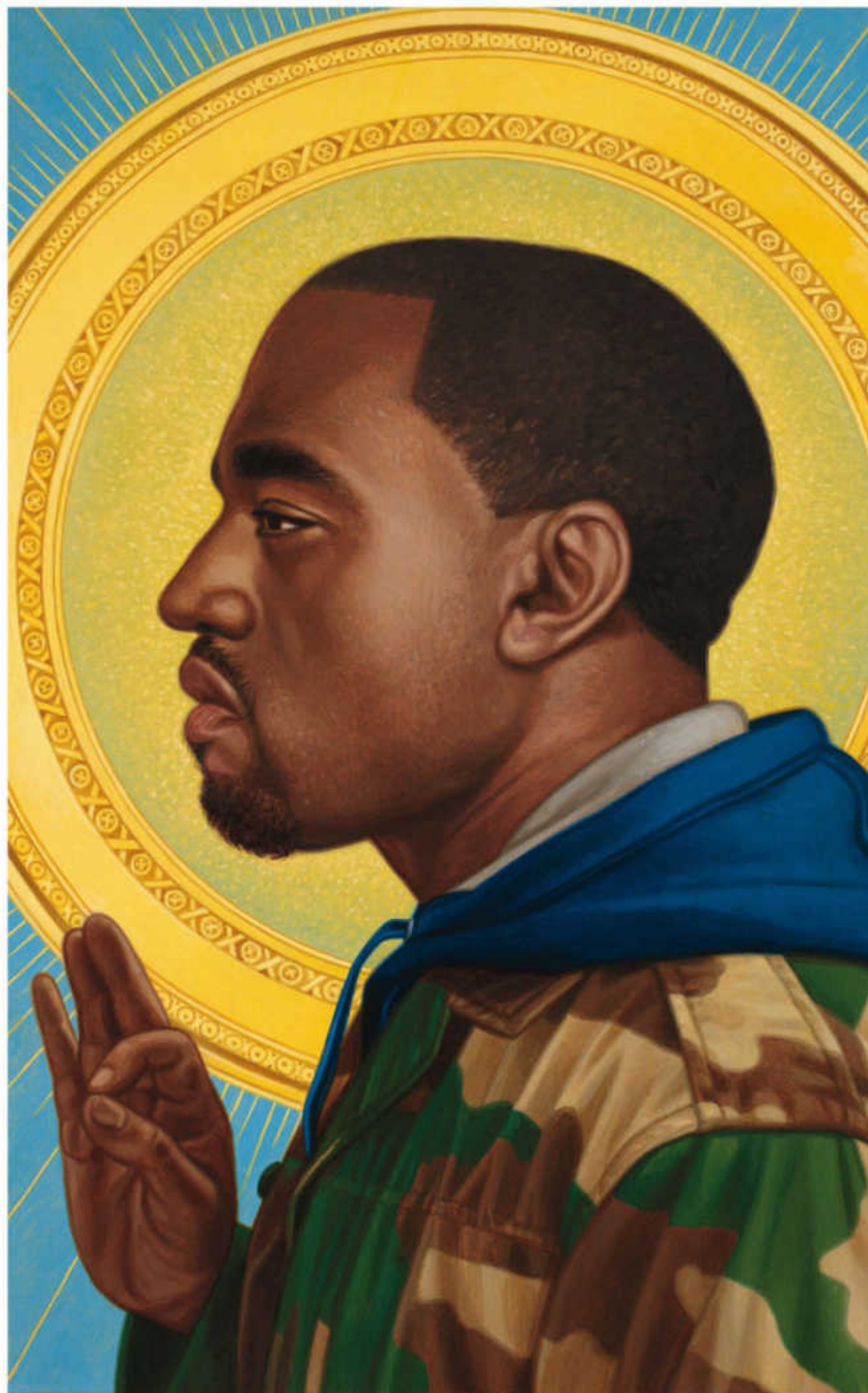
Def Jam/G.O.O.D. Music

★★★★½

BY ROB SHEFFIELD

The world has distracted from Kanye West's creative process – except, as he shows on *The Life of Pablo*, distraction *is* his creative process. This is a chaotic album that feels like it was made that way on purpose after the laser-sharp intensity of 2013's *Yeezus*. It's a labored-over opus that tries hard to sound like a sprawling mess, because it's made by an artist who knows he's a mess and doesn't care to hide it. "My psychiatrist got kids that I inspired" is the most brilliant line on the album – Ye can't even go to the shrink without getting his ass kissed about what a big shot he is, so he has to go to the studio instead.

Pablo is designed to sound like a work in progress. Opener "Ultralight Beam" sets up a gospel theme with Kirk Franklin, Kelly Price, the-Dream and Chance the Rapper – but West rarely stays in the same mood too long. He brings in Ri-



Reviews

hanna to sing a Nina Simone hook, then duets with Chris Brown a few tracks later. High-profile guests play the role of his sick conscience, whether it's the Weeknd in the marital-blues slow jam "FML" or Young Thug in "Highlights."

West hides behind his douchebag mask whenever he gets scared he's exposed himself too deeply in the expansively emotional music. He wants the world to see him as an asshole, because he gets terrified the world might see him as a restless husband ("FML"), a manipulative phony ("Real Friends"), a distant dad ("Father Stretch My Hands, Pt. 2") and all the other things he worries he is. "30 Hours" looks back on a failed relationship over an Arthur Russell art-funk groove, but it sounds like he's actually mourning the long-running love affair between Kanye and Kanye. "You was the best of all time at the time, though/Yeah, but you wasn't mine, though" – he's talking to himself in the mirror. That's why "I Love Kanye" stings, especially the punchline: "I love you like Kanye loves Kanye." West knows he always fucks over the one he loves, even the one he loves most – himself.

West is a genius who worries the world only likes him for being a clown. (St. Paul felt that way, too.) When he wears his clown hat on *Pablo*, as in his misogynous jokes in "Famous," it's embarrassing – he's just aiming for cheap laughs and not even getting those. But that's part of what West's trying to figure out. Here's a grown man, not to mention a pioneering artist, wondering why he has to keep playing the "38-year-old eight-year-old." *Pablo* doesn't go for any grand musical or emotional statements on the level of "Bound 2," "Runaway" or "Hey Mama." West just drops broken pieces of his psyche all over the album and challenges you to fit them together. 

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Macklemore and Lewis

Macklemore Weighs the Price of Fame

Seattle MC gets introspective, owns up to white privilege on a heartfelt follow-up

Macklemore and Ryan Lewis

This Unruly Mess I've Made Macklemore ★★★★★



Macklemore and Ryan Lewis' 2012 breakout, *The Heist*, was a heartwarming underdog success story. A true son of Seattle, Macklemore does a fair amount of hand-wringing over his fame on this long-awaited follow-up:

The album opens with "Light Tunnels," which makes winning at the Grammys sound like a winter shoveling snow in a Soviet gulag, and songs like "Brad Pitt's Cousin" and "The Train" work the same self-pitying theme. "Make better music," he wills himself on "Bolo Tie." And sometimes he does, especially when the beats turn soulful and artists like Leon Bridges and Chance the Rapper swing by for assists.

With the exception of the exuberant "Downtown," coming up with "Thrift Shop"-style catchiness is rarely the goal here. Macklemore would rather see himself in the tradition of old-school edutainers like KRS-One (who appears on "Buckshot"). He's at his best balancing introspection and teacherly realism, as on "Growing Up (Sloane's Song)," a moving letter to his daughter that adorably advises, "Study David Bowie, James Baldwin and Tupac." And the nearly nine-minute "White Privilege II" is more than worth its weight in think pieces. "My success is a product of the same system that let off Darren Wilson," he raps in one of many oh-shit realizations. In doing what he can to excavate all the theft and violence the American dream is built on, Macklemore redeems every other indulgence on the record. JON DOLAN



Bonnie Raitt

Dig in Deep Redwing ★★★★★½

Raitt's own songwriting shines amid perfectly pitched covers

Bonnie Raitt has long been a singer-songwriter's best friend, a deep-blues interpreter with sublime taste in composers, from Jackson Browne and Randy Newman to the Jazz Age siren Sippie Wallace. Raitt is as bold and sharp on this LP, made with her longtime road band. She takes sensual charge of INXS' "Need You Tonight" and renders Joe Henry's ballad "You've Changed My Mind" with healing authority. Raitt's own writing is often a secret strength, but she comes out swinging in "Unintended Consequence of Love" and closes with "The Ones We Couldn't Be," an intimate dissection of a broken affair delivered with the force of memoir. DAVID FRICKE



Tedeschi Trucks Band

Let Me Get By Fantasy/Concord

★★★★★

Heirs apparent to the Southern-jam crown step right up

With the Allmans retired, the jam scene's Southern division needs a new top dog, and the TTB sound like it here. Guitar hero Derek Trucks has more freedom than the Allmans provided – see the dreamy raga-style acoustic coda to "Crying Over You," the set's high point. The horns, like the grooves, split the difference between Stax-Volt funk muscle and jazzy New Orleans elegance. Susan Tedeschi has chops, charm and a workmanlike style that could at times use some pizzazz. But, sharing duties with vocalist Mike Mattison and the other soloists, she steers a band greater than its parts, and still growing better. WILL HERMES

BACKSTAGE PASS

SPECIAL OFFERS AND PROMOTIONS

Update: Jazz Rock

Restless Spirits Pushing Past the Edge of Rock

NOT SINCE HERBIE HANCOCK robo-rocked the Grammys in 1984 have jazz and pop felt as closely intertwined as they do this year. Kendrick Lamar made a bold case for fusion on *To Pimp a Butterfly*, David Bowie echoed it on his parting shot, *Blackstar* – and on *Emily's D+Evolution*, co-produced with Bowie wingman Tony Visconti, **Esperanza Spalding** restates the point. After snatching the Best New Artist Grammy from Justin Bieber in 2011 and tilting mainstream in 2012, jazz's most intriguing genre outlaw returns to category-busting. She straddles Hendrix and King

Crimson on "Good Lava," then declares "no more acting these predictable roles" on the swirling soul-jazz ballad "Unconditional Love." Spalding makes good on that

promise. She's a formidable melodist on bass and a fascinating vocal harmonist – on "Judas" and "Noble Nobles," she conjures the Seventies tag team of Joni Mitchell and Jaco Pastorius in one person. There are modern echoes too: St. Vincent, Solange Knowles, Radiohead. But like all great jazz women, Spalding is an original: Check her flow on "Ebony and Ivy," a meditation on race and achievement that joins jazz and poetry in a way Lamar might appreciate. **Snarky Puppy** are genre outlaws too: a small orchestra with jazz-funk moves and jam-band grooves. The live-in-the-



Snarky Puppy

Esperanza Spalding
Emily's D+Evolution

★★★★

Snarky Puppy *Family Dinner Volume 2*

★★★★½

Jeff Buckley *You and I* ★★★

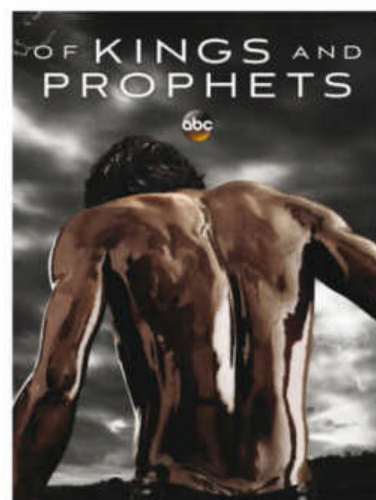
studio revue *Family Dinner Volume 2* features British soul singer Laura Mvula, Mali's Salif Keita and veteran booster **David Crosby**, who has declared the Puppy "quite possibly the most advanced band in the world." Crosby's "Somebody Home" gets beautifully wrapped in horns, organ, guitars, piano and more by a 14-member crew. Solos are fleeting; interplay is the thing. See Charlie Hunter's funky seven-string guitar on "Molino Moreno," with Peruvian icon Susana Baca recalling the old-school elegance of the Buena Vista Social Club – a group that similarly saw jazz improv and lyric-driven songcraft as one language.

All this renewed activity makes it an interesting time to revisit the jazz strains in **Jeff Buckley**'s work, which you can hear on *You and I*, a set of previously unreleased early studio recordings from the late singer. He channels singing saxophonist Louis Jordan on "Don't Let the Sun Catch You Cryin'" and stretches the melody on Dylan's "Just Like a Woman" like a ramen-noodle master. It's the sort of invention rock and pop could use more of.

WILL HERMES

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Buckley



Spalding

Reviews

Neon Dreams, Bright as New

The 1975 strut and preen like
pop rockers from the Eighties

The 1975 *I Like It When You
Sleep, for You Are So Beautiful Yet
So Unaware of It* Interscope ★★ ★



Hey, what gives, fellas? INXS and Duran Duran weren't around in 1975. This ascendant U.K. quartet ground their second album in sleek dance rock that often feels like it was sculpted on a gaudy Eighties budget as the bandmates tried hard not to get too sweaty in their aqua-neon sport jackets. No shame in that – and they do it well, filtering in elements of spacy ambience (with echoes of acts from My Bloody Valentine to M83), Jacksonian R&B and arty dance pop. At times, the vibe approximates what might have happened if Michael Hutchence had stuck around long enough to



make a record with LCD Soundsystem's James Murphy in the producer's chair. "Love Me" funkily recalls Nile Rodgers' splashiest Duran productions; "A Change of Heart" is the John Hughes soundtrack ballad moment. Singer Matthew Healy is a smooth, versatile crooner, going from disco lizard king (the slickly strutting "UGH") to the Brit-soul buoyancy of "Loving Someone" to the careless whispers of "Paris."

The album's rambling, vaguely emo title is a giveaway: Despite opening big, bright and airtight, *I Like It When You Sleep...* gets boring-melty during dream-gaze reveries like "Please Be Naked" and "Lostmyhead." Even so, when they hit the right kind of moody sheen ("Somebody Else," "Loving Someone"), the 1975 are an enjoyable balance of desire and distraction.

JON DOLAN

© JENN FIVE

Two irresistible flavors

I can't believe they're making
a megastar like me do this.

Hey, I know those guys.





Santigold

99¢ Atlantic ★★½

Singer sells bleeding-edge cool and does it in style

"All I want to do is bottle it to sell," Santigold sings. It's a fitting boast from an artist whose stylish mix of dubby hip-hop and neon-tinged New Wave has been used to hawk cars and insurance. But the smarts, confidence and versatility of her third LP are undeniable. She and her collaborators, including ex-Vampire Weekender Ros-tam Batmanglij, create a sound that's immaculately haute but also playfully warm. Even if her persona is mostly surface ("They call me a fashion plate, lil man/I be pullin' stunts from France to Japan"), she's always an enjoyable cipher. **JON DOLAN**



Loretta Lynn

Full Circle Legacy ★★★★★

Country's queen returns to 'Fist City' on first LP in 12 years

For her first album since 2004's *Van Lear Rose*, the iconic queen of no-bullshit country, now 83, looks more backward than forward. Culled from a decade's worth of sessions and co-produced by John Carter Cash, *Full Circle* is a homey set, with traditional numbers and re-worked oldies, including a reprise of Lynn's own "Fist City" that loses nothing with the years. She closes with "Lay Me Down," a Willie Nelson duet, declaring, "I'll be at peace when they lay me down." Having transformed country music with inspiring and groundbreaking vision, she well should be. **WILL HERMES**



M. Ward

More Rain Merge ★★½

Indie star enlists R.E.M.'s Peter Buck, others for modern oldies

M. Ward is the best sort of traditionalist: one that blurs time. You hear it in his rough-hewn, daydreamy take on the Beach Boys' 1965 classic "You're So Good to Me." Ward scrapped plans for a full-on doo-wop-inspired set, but the idea's echo is still there: "Time Won't Wait" is a tour de force of vocal arranging with Neko Case; "Little Baby" has Ward's falsetto crooning over a flood of "sha-la-la-las" and "doo-wop-yip-yip"s. Elsewhere, R.E.M.'s Peter Buck adds trademark touches to Ward's own guitar-tone magic. The vibe is retro, but the spirit is eternal. **WILL HERMES**



Porches

Pool Domino ★★½

Bedroom-pop guy upgrades his sound, falls deeper in love

Aaron Maine has written a boatload of sad songs in recent years – good ones, too, dabbling in a wide range of low-fi basement-blues styles. His latest LP leans heavily on synth-y Eighties sounds; the studied lack of nuance in Maine's voice sets an odd tone, especially when he's flatly serving up valentines like, "Do you remember what we did before?/Did you like it/Or are you mad?" Impressively, though, that line (from "Shape") opens up into a tender drone poem about sex and devotion. Even if he makes Gary Numan sound like Al Green, Maine's optimism is sweet. **JON DOLAN**

under 200 calories.

I don't like the way people are looking at us.



I better be getting paid overtime for this.

ELTON JOHN

[Cont. from 43] since the two paired up as suburban-London youths bunking in Elton's bedroom. Their unorthodox writing technique may explain their long-time partnership: Elton tells Taupin that he's ready to do another album, and Taupin writes up a batch of lyrics that John doesn't look at until he's sitting at the piano in the studio. For years, Elton was still obsessed with commercial success. Then his old friend Bob Dylan came along. Elton listened to 2006's *Modern Times*, and it changed his creative world.

Says Elton, "I thought, 'You know, this is an amazing record by the artist who I probably respect more than anybody who is living, and he's still breaking the mold of what he's trying to do, and he never cares about singles, because he's always been Bob Dylan.'"

Elton has recorded three albums since then: *The Union*, a collaboration with longtime hero Leon Russell; the introspective *The Diving Board*; and now *Wonderful Crazy Night*. T Bone Burnett has helmed all three. Each has been recorded in Burnett's old-timey live-to-tape style. "I just try and make him feel comfortable," he says. "He's an artist like Dylan – you just try and point him in the direction he was already going."

As usual, Elton didn't start thinking about the sessions until he was in the car on the way to the studio. "I know it sounds mad," he says with a shrug. "I'm reading the lyrics, and it inspires me to write something. It's like when you're writing something for a movie, and you're seeing the image on the screen."

For *Wonderful Crazy Night*, Elton used longtime touring band members Olsson and Johnstone. (Johnstone looks exactly the same, with flowing long blond locks, and Olsson has aged gracefully into the drummer version of Batman's Alfred, playing in a suit with white gloves.) Elton told Taupin to keep the songs upbeat. The lyricist put on Van Morrison's happier records to get in the mood. "I listened to 'Wild Night' and '(Straight to Your Heart) Like a Cannonball' many times," says Taupin. But as proud as Elton is of the record, not everyone was happy with it, most notably Capitol Records, his label. Elton knew something was going on, because he hadn't heard anything from Capitol executive Steve Barnett.

Finally, the call arrived. "Steve Barnett said to David, 'You know we love Elton, but we don't want this record,'" Elton says. He admits he was angry at first. "I would have chewed his head off that first day," Elton admits. "But he's a good record man. David said, 'These things happen for a reason.'" Elton's husband was right: They shared the record with Island, which snapped up *Wonderful Crazy Night* immediately.

It turns out, according to Elton, that his husband is right about a lot of things.

THE NIGHT BEFORE ELTON JOHN'S big Wiltern show, he's back at the theater to do a small concert for Sirius listeners and a question-and-answer session moderated by ROLLING STONE's David Fricke. Elton is at his most charming, slagging on Mick Jagger and Keith Richards for rarely producing new music – "I don't think they like each other very much" – and his aborted effort to hook Jagger up with Burnett. "Mick said, 'No, he uses all that old-fashioned equipment,'" says Elton.

He addresses David Bowie's recent death with sorrow and a subtle admiration for the way he lived, a way that is the antithesis of the carnival that has been Elton's personal life. "We know David Bowie, the singer, the outrageous performer," says Elton, "but actually we don't know anything about him. And that's the way it should be in music."

The band runs through new numbers as well as a rousing, funky "Bennie and the Jets," clearly one of Elton's favorite classics. A well-groomed man with a goatee and a pinstripe suit stands in the shadows and takes notes on his phone. He doesn't mingle, just keeps a tight, small smile on his face. It's David Furnish.

Back at the house, Elton proudly refers to Furnish as Yoko and also says he has saved his financial life.

"David came into my life, and in the last two years has been very involved in sorting out the dross that we had surrounding me," says Elton. "We had so many people who were earning vast amounts of money that weren't pulling their weight." Later, he adds, "Every year at this time, we've been looking for money to pay our taxes, but this year we've already got the money."

"David doesn't mind being Yoko Ono," says Elton, "but he's doing it on my behalf."

The stated goal is for Elton to bank enough money in the next couple of years so he can maintain his lavish lifestyle and spend more time with his two boys. Their path to having children was a long and winding one. In 2009, they became attached to a Ukrainian boy named Lev while visiting an orphanage for HIV-positive children. Lev and his brother came from a destroyed family; Elton says his father is in jail. They tried to adopt him, but the government ruled them too old and, more to the point, too gay. (Elton says he and Furnish still provide for Lev and his brother. "We got him to the grandmother, and we surreptitiously look after them," says Elton.) During Christmas, Furnish came to Elton and asked him what he wanted to do moving forward. Did they now want to start their own family? The short time they'd spent with Lev had upturned their world.

"I always said no to having kids, because I'm too old, too set in my ways, too selfish,

the lifestyle doesn't suit me," says Elton. "But I said, 'This boy we met was trying to tell me something.' He was trying to say, through God or someone else, 'Bullshit, you can be a dad, look at how much pleasure I gave you in an hour and a half.'" And I said, 'Let's go for it.'" His son Zachary was born to a surrogate in 2010, and Elijah in 2013. He lets out a giant smile. "God, that was the best decision."

SHOWTIME AT THE WILTERN HAS A nostalgic Elton feel as tickets go for almost \$600. Elton is conservatively dressed, for Elton, in a black sequined jacket and a light-blue shirt. His band knows him in an almost telepathic way, and it rips through the new and old songs with precision and vitality, a quality often missing in the groups backing aging superstars. Elton even jumps onto his piano during "Bennie and the Jets," before gingerly slipping back onto the bench. It is obvious, despite his talk of coming off the road, that Elton's passion remains playing live. Before songwriting and activism, Elton is an entertainer.

"I'm still in the game, I love playing live more than I've ever done," Elton tells me a few days before the show. "I have wonderful musicians – there's nothing in my life to complain about." He pauses and shrugs. "But, boy, do I ever find it."

Elton is a benevolent vampire – he keeps young by collaborating with artists a third his age, including Lady Gaga. Tonight isn't any different. The three weakest numbers are when he's joined onstage by three Island Records stars: Shawn Mendes is outclassed on "Tiny Dancer," Demi Lovato dances spastically during "Don't Go Breaking My Heart," and Patrick Stump tries to come off as hard during a game but futile "Saturday Night's Alright for Fighting."

Still, if the duets weren't actual successes, they did seem to re-energize Elton. His deft fingers sweep through a Bowie-tribute "Space Oddity" instrumental into "Rocket Man," a version so moving that it sends Burnett and his wife into an extended canoodling session.

Elton closes the show with the Taupin-John signature number "Your Song," and kids from seven to 70 sway to the music. But if anyone thought Elton was going soft in his old age, the Bitch is back after he introduces the band. He thanks Taupin, who is watching from somewhere in the wings, and then dedicates the show to his husband. "This is for darling David, who has weeded out all the horrible people in my life."

Fans in the audience turn to one another and give "WTF" shrugs. But it doesn't matter to the piano player. Elton John waves and bows to the crowd. He walks slowly off the stage. There are a few more interviews and promo shots to do, but soon he'll be gone. It's time to see the boys. 

PRESIDENT TRUMP, SERIOUSLY

[Cont. from 39] litical ads on TV for free, we end up having to pay inflated Medicare drug prices, fund bank bailouts with our taxes, let billionaires pay 17 percent tax rates, and suffer a thousand other indignities. Trump is right: Because Jeb Bush can't afford to make his own commercials, he would go into the White House in the pocket of a drug manufacturer. It really is that stupid.

The triumvirate of big media, big donors and big political parties has until now successfully excluded every challenge to its authority. But like every aristocracy, it eventually got lazy and profligate, too sure it was loved by the people. It's now shocked that voters in depressed ex-factory towns won't keep pulling the lever for "conservative principles," or that union members bitten a dozen times over by a trade deal won't just keep voting Democratic on cue.

Trump isn't the first rich guy to run for office. But he is the first to realize the weakness in the system, which is that the watchdogs in the political media can't resist a car wreck. The more he insults the press, the more they cover him: He's pulling 33 times as much coverage on the major networks as his next-closest GOP competitor, and twice as much as Hillary.

Trump found the flaw in the American Death Star. It doesn't know how to turn the cameras off, even when it's filming its own demise.

The problem, of course, is that Trump is crazy. He's like every other corporate tyrant in that his solution to most things follows the logic of Stalin: no person, no problem. You're fired! Except as president he'd have other people-removing options, all of which he likes: torture, mass deportations, the banning of 23 percent of the Earth's population from entering the United States, etc.

He seems to be coming around to the idea that having an ego smaller than that of, say, an Egyptian Pharaoh would be a sign of weakness. So of late, his already-insane idea to build a "beautiful" wall across the Mexican border has evolved to the point where he also wants the wall to be named after him. He told Maria Bartiromo he wanted to call it the "Great Wall of Trump."

In his mind, it all makes sense. Drugs come from Mexico; the wall will keep out Mexicans; therefore, no more drugs. "We're gonna stop it," he says. "You're not going to have the drugs coming in destroying your children. Your kids are going to look all over the place and they're not going to be able to find them."

Obviously! Because no one's ever tried wide-scale drug prohibition before.

And as bad as our media is, Trump is trying to replace it with a worse model. He excommunicates every reporter who so much as raises an eyebrow at his insanity, leaving him with a small-but-dependable crowd of groveling supplicants who in a Trump presidency would be the royal media. He even waves at them during his speeches.

"Mika and Joe are here!" he chirped at the MSNBC morning hosts at a New Hampshire event. The day after he won the New Hampshire primary, he called in to their show to thank them for being "supporters." To her credit, Mika Brzezinski tried to object to the characterization, interrupting Joe Scarborough, who by then had launched into a minute-long homily about how happy he was to be a bug on the windshield of the Trump phenomenon.

You think the media sucks now? Just wait until reporters have to kiss a brass Trump-sphinx before they enter the White House press room.

"He has all these crazy ideas, and [reporters] are so scared of him, they don't ask him any details," says Michael Pleyte, an Iraq vet who came all the way from Michigan to watch the New Hampshire primary in person. "Forget about A to Z, they don't even ask him to go A to Trump."

King Trump. Brace yourselves, America. It's really happening. 

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By Peter Travers

Tina Takes on the Taliban

As a war reporter in Afghanistan, Fey digs into a new kind of role

Whiskey Tango Foxtrot

Tina Fey, Margot Robbie

Directed by Glenn Ficarra and John Requa

★★★

WTF IS COMEDY DIVA TINA Fey doing in *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*, a film based on Kim Barker's memoir about covering the war beat as *The Chicago Tribune's* South Asia bureau chief from 2004 to 2009? Barker called her book *The Taliban Shuffle: Strange Days in Afghanistan and Pakistan*. It's an eye-opener about a newbie correspondent learning on the ground about a different culture. The book is brutally honest and biting hilariously.

This is where Fey comes in. That she's funny is a given. That she gets inside the tangled mind of a complex woman on a perpetual hot seat is something new but not that surprising. From her improvisational days at Second City through her time on *SNL*, which she triumphantly translated into the multi-E Emmy-winning NBC sitcom *30 Rock*, to movies such as *Mean Girls*, *Baby Mama* and *Sisters* and her bestselling autobiography, *Bossypants*, Fey has always shown a gift for lacing laughs with satirical sting.

Sure, we hadn't seen Fey ride in choppers, fire weapons, duck explosions and lock horns with the Taliban, but who else could better mine the gallows humor of suicide bombers and IEDs? In 2011, when Michiko Kakutani reviewed Barker's book for *The New York Times*, she wrote that the author "depicts herself as a sort of Tina Fey character, who unexpectedly finds herself addicted to the adrenaline rush of



Fey is ready for action in the war zone.

war." How prophetic. The movie itself, directed by Glenn Ficarra and John Requa (*Crazy, Stupid, Love*), from a script by *30 Rock* showrunner Robert Carlock, isn't always adept at meshing tones that rocket from comic to serious to absurd to deadly to comic again. To boost the box

office with telegenic topicality, the film changes Barker's job from print journalist to cable-news reporter. OK, that hurts.

Still, the script follows the book in outline with Barker as a fish out of water. She is taken under the wing of British TV journo babe Tanya Van-

derpoel (a sly, stunning Margot Robbie), who invites her to bunk at the Fun House, where other war reporters work hard and party harder. Barker gets royally reamed out by a hard-ass general (Billy Bob Thornton, chewing every insult like a fine cigar). Naive Barker carries around a bright-orange backpack: "Where are you going to hide it, inside a fucking sunset?"

Barker ups her learning curve with help from an Afghan driver (a soulful Christopher Abbott), and with a Scottish photographer (Martin Freeman in full-on charm mode) she takes to bed. To save him, she even puts out for the future Pakistan prime minister (Alfred Molina).

There's a lot going on here. Maybe too much. The filmmakers can't draw coherence out of chaos. But Fey does. Her potent performance grows as Barker grows a conscience about the fragile, ravaged region she's covering. Chasing things that go boom gets her face time on the news. But what else? Fey lets that question hang in the air. She knows the power of making you laugh till it hurts.

Jesse Owens Finds Gold in Diversity

Race

Stephan James

Directed by Stephen Hopkins

★★½

Jesse Owens is a great subject for a movie, even one as by-the-numbers as *Race*. Owens was the track-and-field wonder from Ohio State who made Hitler suck it up at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin by forcing the Führer to see a black man win four gold medals and shatter those cuckoo theories about an Aryan master race.

Stephan James (*Selma*) gives his all as Owens, honing his gift with coach Larry Snyder (a first-



James as Owens

rate Jason Sudeikis) and defying NAACP pressure to boycott the Games. Director Stephen Hopkins fares best and jumps highest when filling in the corners of a story we only thought we knew.

Anatomy of a Robbery

Triple 9

Casey Affleck, Kate Winslet, Woody Harrelson

Directed by John Hillcoat

★★★

DIRTY COPS. THE RUSSIAN mob. Superhero masks. Severed heads. A heist gone bloody wrong. Those are just a few of the elements that go into making *Triple 9* a crime caper like no other. It helps that the ringmaster of all this whup-ass is John Hillcoat, the Aussie director who made his bones with 2005's *The Proposition*, a classic revenge Western.

Triple 9 doesn't go that deep into the heart of human darkness. But it rattles and hums along Georgia's mean streets like a machine built to batter. Casey Affleck stars as Chris Allen, a rookie Atlanta cop trying to stay legal. His hinky buds, cops and special-ops vets played by Chiwetel Ejiofor, Anthony Mackie, Clifton Collins Jr., Aaron



Aaron Paul on a hell ride

Paul and Norman Reedus, tag him for a patsy. That comes in handy when they're blackmailed by the Russians in the person of Irina (Kate Winslet having a blast with the accent, the wig, the attitude and the chance to go bug-fuck nuts). They've already robbed a bank for her. Now Irina wants more (something about saving her boss and owning the secrets of kings). To distract the law while they do Irina's bidding, these bent badges decide to kill the newbie and call in a 999—police code for "officer down." Chaos ensues, title explained.

Got that? Screenwriter Matt Cook doesn't make it easy. You kind of wish there was an app to follow the plot. But know this: Chris doesn't die. In fact, he's hellbent on bringing this corrupt crew to justice. No one is there for him except his rogue uncle, Detective Jeffrey Allen, played by a superb Woody Harrelson with the coiled intensity of a cobra ready to spring. "Your job: Outmonster the monster," he tells Chris. Watching him do it is what makes the movie. *Triple 9* is no *Reservoir Dogs*, but it is a twisty, terrific ride.

A Crucible of Horror

The Witch

Anya Taylor-Joy

Directed by Robert Eggers

★★★★½

REMEMBER THE NAME Robert Eggers. His debut film, *The Witch*, is a crafty calling card brimming with beauty and terror. Eggers pulls us into the supernatural with subtle cunning and meticulous attention to detail. The setting, an isolated New England farm, circa 1630, seems to rise out of the mist. Farmer William (Ralph Ineson) and his wife, Katherine (Kate Dickie), face a crisis when their



Taylor-Joy: A witch or something more human?

unbaptized baby, Samuel, the youngest of their five children, goes missing while in the care of his sister Thomasin (Anya Taylor-Joy). Is Samuel the victim of cultish ritual? Is Thomasin a witch? Taylor-Joy, a genuine acting find, keeps us guessing while she shatters our nerves.

Eggers astutely mixes the rational and its opposite, putting everyone under suspicion. Caleb (Harvey Scrimshaw), the eldest son, makes much of his godliness. And when the twins, Mercy (Ellie Grainger) and Jonas (Lucas Dawson), befriend a goat they call Black Phillip, well, holy shit!

Building his film on the diabolical aftershocks of Puritan repression, Eggers raises *The Witch* far above the horror herd. He doesn't need cheap tricks. Eggers merely directs us to look inside. Be warned: It'll scare the hell out of you.

L.A. Love on the Rocks

Knight of Cups

Christian Bale

Directed by Terrence Malick

★★★

BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE WANDER L.A. byways and beaches, mumbling to themselves while searching for meaning in random encounters, erotic and mystical. No surprise that *Knight of Cups* is the work of Terrence Malick, a cinema poet whose recent work has shifted from dreamy (*The Tree of Life*) to droning (*To the Wonder*). *Knight of Cups*, the title derived from a symbol-freighted Tarot card, casts Christian Bale as a modern pilgrim, a



Blanchett and Bale living a bad dream

Hollywood writer adrift in malaise. He exasperates his ex-wife (Cate Blanchett), impregnates a married woman (Natalie Portman) and frustrates his dad (Brian Dennehy). Since Malick runs from even a hint of plot, it's up to us

to draw conclusions. I feel Malick has enlisted acting royalty and a great cinematographer (Emmanuel Lubezki) to get lost in his private dreams. Do you feel left out? I do. There's a line between artful and arty, and Malick has crossed it.

Yoko Ono

The 83-year-old artist talks about childhood fables, ephemeral success and why it's important to get outside

Who are your heroes?

That's easy – my husband, John Lennon. He was the only person who put up with me. It's difficult for a guy to understand what women are thinking. Most guys don't even listen. He was very forward-thinking in that sense. He really jumped into feminism, no argument. He would ask me, "Could you find feminist groups for me?" Even now, I don't think men get together and say, "Let's be feminists."

Do you have a favorite city?

I love every city I've been to, but Liverpool is great. John and I would pass through and say hello to relatives. People there are really strong in spirit, especially the women. I wouldn't say they're working-class – I don't think they'd like for me to label them that way – but they have a working-class mentality, a strength and wisdom.

What music still moves you?

Indian music is incredible. Gypsy music is fantastic. All the Middle Eastern music is very strong. John and I loved folk songs from different countries – the rhythm and the harmonies are very, very different. I can't say, you know, "Be-Bop-a-Lula."

What do you think John would have made of social media?

John felt that something like social media would come out. He was doing that anyway. When somebody said something he didn't like, he would send a letter: "It's not true!" He would never ignore those communications.

Do you have a fitness regimen?

I walk around. Walking is such a great way to relax. I know it might be dangerous, but that's only in the corner of my mind. Maybe I'm the only one now. Very few famous people are walking around now. They disappeared. It's that kind of world. It's sad, isn't it?

What's the best advice you've gotten?

I don't take advice. My background is very different, so it's very difficult for a person to advise me. My parents were very liberal and cherished that I had my own opinions. Other people's thinking is theirs, and my thinking is mine. There's no point in listening. And, so far, it's gone well.

Did you get advice about how to make records a certain way?

I make records *my* certain way.
What was your favorite book growing up?

Ono's latest LP, "Yes, I'm a Witch Too," is out now.

There were two, and both are Chinese. One, *Sangokushi*, tells you how to battle very carefully and logically. The other, *Saiyuki*, has more to do with spiritual traveling. One monk decides how to solve a situation, not in a battle. One guy is very cocky. He says, "I know everything, and I can fly to the end of the world in 10 seconds." The monk says, "Show me how you do it." The guy goes *zoom, zoom* to the end of the world, and at the end are five huge poles. He says, "I'll put my name on that." He writes his name and goes back to the monk and says, "I just went to the end of the world." And he says, "Oh, really?" The monk opens up his hand and says, "Are these the poles?" Meaning the guy never went anywhere. He never went outside of the monk's five fingers.

What's your favorite memory of your friend David Bowie?

He was one of the very few people who liked my work. I think he said something about my music in [the 1992 compilation] *Onobox* that was very nice. At the time, nobody cared about it, and he was courageous to say something.

What books are you reading right now?

I usually read three books at once. One right now is *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success* [by Deepak Chopra]. It pretends to be about success so people will say, "I want to read that!" But actually, he's making a very good statement about how you can be spiritually successful. I love actual printed books. I can't get out of that yet.

Have you thought about writing a memoir?

No. That would be a very tricky thing to do. I care about writing something that would make some people feel bad, even though they maybe *were* bad. I think about their children and wives, and I don't want to hurt anybody. So the book would be rather... boring [laughs].

What's the best part of success?

Well, I don't know, because I'm not successful yet. We're not getting world peace.

Is that your gauge for success?

Well, I wouldn't say, "Until then," but it's one of the big things for me.

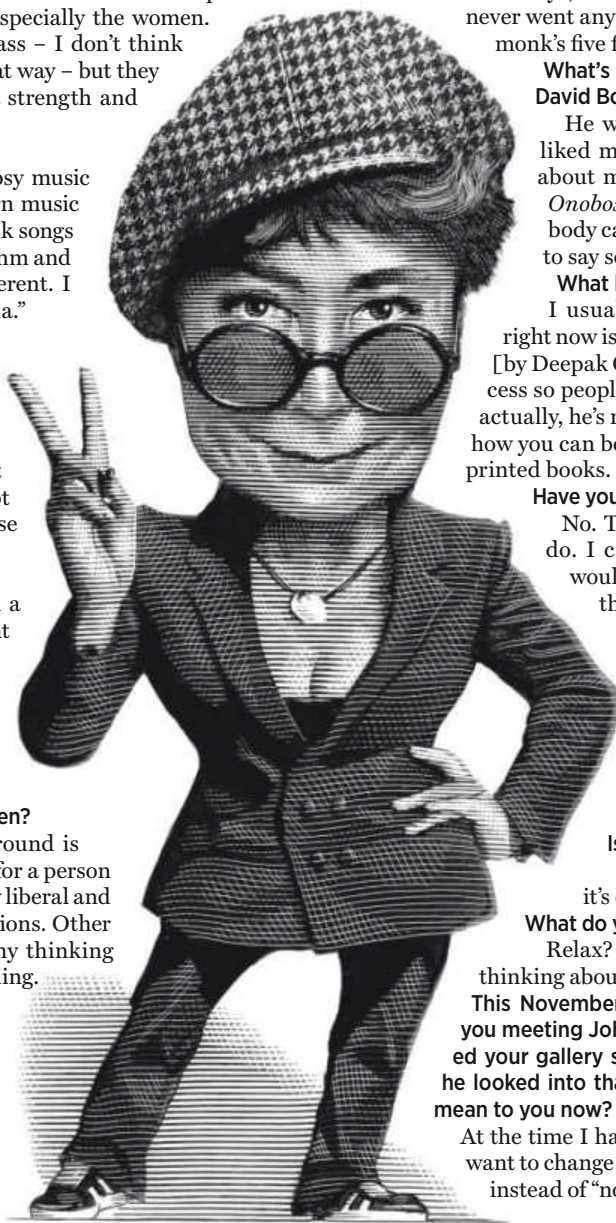
What do you do to relax?

Relax? I don't relax too much. I'm always thinking about the next project.

This November will mark the 50th anniversary of you meeting John for the first time, when he attended your gallery show in London. You had a spyglass he looked into that said, "Yes." What does that work mean to you now?

At the time I had a very difficult life. I said, "Well, I want to change it," and this was a sign that said "yes" instead of "no." It saved me.

INTERVIEW BY DAVID BROWNE





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